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ASIT KUMAR HALDAR

# ART AND TRADITION

By

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Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures  
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*Preface by*

THE RIGHT HON'BLE MARQUESS OF ZETLAND

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Dedicated  
to the Memory of  
The Late E. B. Havell

1892  
March 1st  
Morse & B. 1892

## Preface

The esteem in which Mr. Haldar is held by those who are familiar with his work as Principal of the Government School of Arts and Crafts in Lucknow is well illustrated by the decision recently taken by the governing body of the sister-city of Allahabad to reserve exclusively for his works a hall in the Municipal Museum.

But Mr. Haldar's musings upon art are of interest to a far wider circle. He was one of the small band of artists who realised instinctively the significance of the movement which sprang from the momentous meeting more than thirty years ago of Abanindranath Tagore with E. B. Havell and he is able, therefore, to speak with intimate personal knowledge of the circumstances attending what has proved to be a genuine renaissance of Indian art. It is interesting to learn that of the thirty members of the Indian Society of Oriental art which came into existence to sponsor the movement only five were Indians, it is equally interesting to the reader of the pages which follow to know that their author was an exhibitor at the first display of pictures held under the auspices of the Society in 1908.

On the many aspects of art upon which Mr. Haldar touches it is not possible to comment within the limits of a preface. Those who are aware of the mastery of line which has been so striking a characteristic of Indian Art from the days of Asoka onwards will read with interest

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what he has to say on that subject; and few will dissent either from his plea that the crafts of a people should not be dissociated from their art or from his contention that if craftsmanship is to flourish as a creative activity instead of as a mere reproductive process—even if the designs reproduced are those of earlier epochs of artistic achievement—it is essential that the patronage of the wealthy which disappeared with the eclipse of Moghul rule, should play its part once more.

Much curiosity was excited when some little time ago it became known that at the advanced age of seventy Rabindranath Tagore whose fame as a poet had long been established in both hemispheres, had begun to give pictorial expression to his thoughts. This phenomenon has attracted the attention of the author of these pages who discusses with sympathetic insight the nature of the urge which has been responsible for it. In the domain of metaphysics the Indian monist in his search for an explanation of the universe which we see around us, has found it in the idea contained in the sanskrit word *Lila* which may be said to correspond in this connection to the English word spontaneity. The universe in the words of an Indian writer is "The divine exuberance blooming into a perpetual efflorescence"; it is not, that is to say, the creation either of God's necessity or of his desire, but is inherent in god's nature. In the case of the poet become painter the explanation would seem to be a similar one, for to use Mr. Haldar's words we see here the outcome of concentrated *ananda*; and in such circumstances any lack of precise knowledge of the technique



of line and colour does not detract either from the value or the attractiveness of the resulting picture.

In another chapter the author gives us a fascinating account of his expedition to the Ramgarh Hills in the Central Provinces in pursuance of the task which had been entrusted to him of copying the two thousand year old paintings on the ceilings of the Jogimara Caves.

Were I to give further rein to my pen I should exceed by far the limits appropriate to a preface. The mention which I have made of these two particular chapters is in itself sufficient to give some idea of the variety of fare which Mr. Haldar has set before the reader and, as I should hope, to encourage him to study these fascinating pages for himself.

23, Down Street  
London, W. 1.  
March, 1938.

ZETLAND

CHAPITRE

CHAPITRE  
DE LA  
MÉTAPHYSIQUE

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

(For Revised Edition)

*Art and Tradition* was first published by Mr. L. N. Agarwal of Agra in 1933 and was received well by the press and the public. It has been since prescribed in the various Universities where drawing and painting have been included in the diploma and degree curriculum.

All the articles in this book originally appeared in periodicals and journals, viz., *Rupam*, *Rooplekha*, *Calcutta Review*, *Modern Review*, *Advance*, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, *Hindusthan Times*, *Bombay Chronical*, *Saqi* and *Dawn of India*. A chapter on Ajanta, has been added in this revised edition. "The Stray Thoughts on Art" originally appeared in the Bengali magazines *Bharati* and *Pricharika* under the title *Chite-phonta* and was subsequently translated in English by Dr. Amiya Chakravarty for *Rupam*.

I wish to express here my gratitude to Mr. Shyama Prasad Mukerjee, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calcutta for according his kind permission to publish an abridged version in English of the Adhar Chandra Mukerjee Lectureship Lecture delivered by me in 1934.

Thanks are due to the Publisher and also to professor T. P. Roy and Mr. Krishna Gopal going through the proofs of this edition.

Prantika,  
Trans-Gomti Civil Lines,  
Lucknow.  
March, 1952.

Asit Kumar Halder.



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## ART AND INDIVIDUALITY

Emerson has said, "Every individual nature has its own beauty." In all individual artistic creation and expression the personality of the artist can be traced. An English artist, Lanteri also said, "The individuality makes an artist," and this would certainly be accepted by everybody who has any knowledge of art. A study of the works of the great masters will prove this fact. The paintings of the renaissance school though they superficially look almost alike, owing to similarity of medium and subject matter, when studied closely, show the stamp of individuality of the artist, each artist having his peculiar trait. To the layman this distinctive feature may not be apparent, just as it is difficult for the Aryan to recognise the individual character in Mongolian faces ; nevertheless the difference remains. If the pre-Raphaelite, Byzantine or any other art of Europe are scrutinised, it will be seen that none of the great masters ever tried to force their own individuality upon their pupils, thus making them intellectual slaves. In India, too, if we observe the Bagh Cave-paintings, the Jogimara Cave paintings, or the paintings at Ajanta we shall see that though the names of the artists are not signed in their respective works, their individuality stands out quite conspicuously. Such individual expressions accelerate distinctive quality in art. Both in life and art the factors of individual talent and worth give so much distinctiveness that they cannot

be missed.

Art teachers should not as a rule impose their personality on their pupils. On the contrary they have to see that the individuality and personality of their pupils are developed without jeopardizing the natural growth of talent in them. They can only help by giving them lessons in technique and create a proper environment and cultural atmosphere in which their talent might thrive. Thus the teacher will have to remain always alert to enlighten and admonish his disciple (*chela*) in every respect without hampering the spontaneity of his individual development. It deters the progress and spontaneity of the individual artist if he is not allowed freedom to choose his style of work and if he is coached too much in an academic fashion. In ancient days, art teaching depended upon the personality of the teacher who inspired his students. The students used to live with the master and learn things directly under close observation and association with him, but they did not simply imitate him. The works of the old masters were put before the students for their guidance to give them opportunities of judging the standard of the artistic work carried on in the past. This kind of help, conducive to the imaginative faculty of the lay-artist, was generally conducted by men of immense experience and talent. Combined with other qualities, the imagination of the disciple was sought to be disciplined and developed; that is why mere imitation of master artists was so strongly condemned by great teachers.



The synthetic blending of mental traits such as observation, memory, and reasoning are component aspects of personality, and as such, observation is an essential faculty to be developed in the art student. The teacher has to guide the pupils in observing objects of art as well as nature. The art-teacher should so inspire his disciples as to develop their sensibilities to reveal new aesthetic values in their observation and creation.

In some schools we find great similarity of spirit in the various artists, but if carried too far it certainly leads to the degeneration of the school as a whole. The teacher must therefore sound the true note by his own artistic creation and thus give a new impetus to his disciples. The master through his creation should himself enrich and elevate the traditional acquisitions of his country instead of blindly imitating them. This will indeed inspire his pupils who will then be in a position to appreciate and pay due regard to the works of the artists of by-gone days who helped the art to grow. Such cultural influence would not only produce good results amongst the pupils but will spontaneously regenerate the art-life of the country.

A good artist is not satisfied with one particular style of art, but would constantly wish to cut out new channels of expression in his own work. He will continually try to seek new expressions through new mediums. But an orthodox teacher generally tries to see that his disciples do not go astray from the rigid canons of the academy. This, of course, is not a healthy view as far as the teacher of art is concerned. But by using

new expressions it is not intended that the pupils should exceed their natural limits and thus set the Thames on fire. On the contrary, they are expected to retain their unique stamp of art-heritage and individuality. But at the same time the teacher should save his pupils from prejudices and allow them free play of the imagination. Callousness on the part of a teacher in trying to understand the natural bent as regards the style of his pupils is dangerous, and would simply cripple the growth of their talents. However great his own work may be the pupils should have scope for their own individual expression. It is only to save them from disaster that the teacher should explain to them the beauty of nature, what is good in tradition, and how to give expression to one's own feeling through respective mediums. This is the reason why technique is taught at the outset to the pupils, so that they may have the discipline which would help them to develop and evolve their respective styles.

In modern art-teaching many masters attach more importance to the analytical system. If this system is practised there is no doubt the students understand the old masters better, but if it is over done there is the danger that the prejudiced and sophisticated student or master will generally seek beauty in the art of an artist of his own choice and thus create a Pseudo-School of Art, as we have a Pseudo School of Modern Art with no better consequence.

The artists who bring renaissance in art are those who themselves crave for wide fields of expression and are sources of inspiration to their



followers and never become dummies for imitation. Disciples should have proper education and discipline to get inspiration from their master and never aspire to become his copyists. In this way they must achieve individual success and develop their own mode of expression. This is essential in the teaching of art which every art-teacher should try to observe. It is indeed a very delicate task as it is not very easy to forget oneself at the time of teaching and to inspire one's pupils by words and deeds simultaneously. This is a *Sadhana*, the achievement of which may take a life-time, and may prove successful only amongst a very few disciples who have a "third eye" to see what his *Guru* wants to evoke in him. But only through this kind of teaching can a great school of art be built.

## GRACE IN LINE

The first line scratched by the pre-historic cave-dweller in his remote cave-chamber was the earliest creation of human beings in the art world. This Palaeolithic or Neolithic cave-man's drawing simultaneously appeared as record, sign, and ritualistic emblem and obviously turned into hieroglyphic picture-writing. In Chinese writing such pictorial elements are still traceable. We apparently do not perceive lines in nature; nature reveals herself to us in mass, colour and in *chiaroscuro* and not in line. How then was it possible for the cave-dweller to discover such outlines depicting their ideas in art-forms in their leisure hours? Lying dormant in the human soul is that art-consciousness which aroused in our unsophisticated primitive forefathers the passion for beauty and pointed out the method of its expression. The pursuit of hunting not only gave them food but also revealed to them the treasures of nature and the sublimity of natural forms. They found the subject of their paintings in the object that they admired during their hunting trips. Perhaps returning home in the dusk of evening, or lying in wait for prey, the shadowy outlines of a prowling tiger-cat or an antelope coming to a rivulet to drink, first suggested to the primitive hunter the beauty of line. Thus we see that line-value in the art of painting is to be found in primitive art all over the world. In the more developed schools of painting in Europe, when realistic

rendering was sought, specially the Renaissance school, an artificial blending of mass and colour on canvas became necessary. But the ninth century Byzantine school and the old Greeks were great masters of line and form. Ancient Egypt used the same primordial lineal technique in painting pictures. The flowing lines of Indian painting are of exquisite beauty. Our ancient relics, which still survive from the time of Asoka in the Jogimara cave in the C. P., show these beautiful flowing lines. A herd of elephants and a band of dancers are depicted by sensitive lines rather than by colour and chiaroscuro. The artist has created lines which do not exist actually in nature. On the form of a tree the light dances. It lights up every object but reveals to us no out lines, only mass patterns and colours are visible. The grace of nature comes into the soul of a painter just as the sun-light glows up a flower. The lines of the Ajanta, Rajput and Moghul paintings are so mobile that they seem to live. The lines of the Ajanta, paintings are both rhythmic and dynamic. In the Rajput and Moghul paintings the lines are unique in their delicacy and refinement.

To-day the Revivalist school of painting, which was started in Bengal some forty-five years back has been trying to make use of this tradition and find out new expressions in line. Oriental art as a whole is imaginative, and as such does not stress upon so much for realistic forms as for idealistic conceptions. All painting is to a certain extent elusive. For instance, we see objects in the distance small in perspective, but we know that this smallness is due



to an optical illusion. The sense of relativity is there, but we try to imitate nature as we see it, and not as it actually is. Thus in this case the modern sense of perspective is at variance with reality. Similarly, when we paint landscapes, we paint distance in blue, though that blue does not actually exist in reality. Again, if objects are drawn in lines, though the lines are not there, in actual fact they should not be considered unnatural just because they do not produce any plastic sense. Forms created in line are full of beauty and harmony and may at the same time lack in plastic effect.

Artists all the world over to-day realise the beauty of lineal form in art and are creating forms of infinite grace through that medium. It is no longer considered an unsophisticated hobby of the primitive, but a modern vehicle of art-expression. Chinese and Japanese artists have developed a higher technique in line-forms and in each stroke of the brush they make their canvas live. The ultra-modernists of Europe are now trying to find out the psychological expression of the primitive child-mind through their art, and so Paul Klee, Picasso, Gris, Andre Masson and others have come forward to paint pictures with simple line-drawing. Why do we admire a china or a brass pot? Because we see a nice curve which suggests to us the beauty of a certain curved line. The line, the most primitive invention of the technique in painting, unconsciously gives us food for aesthetic and as such will ever remain a method of expression of all artists.

## MANNERISM AND TRADITION

There is still some misunderstanding in some quarters regarding the traditional school of painting and its possibilities in India. But no true artist should undervalue tradition in art. Moreover, I doubt if anyone would go to the extent of depreciating Tradition if he had an adequate personal knowledge of the glorious heritage of Indian Art. Had he been (to mention only one instance) to Ajanta and seen the gigantic and monumental panorama of paintings on the walls of its famous caves, I am sure, he would have felt its strong influence and caught the mannerism of that particular school of art which those paintings represent specially when he wanted to deal with any ancient or mythological subject in his paintings.

To clarify the point I should at the outset explain what Dr. Abanindra Nath Tagore, the father of the Indian Renaissance School, and the small band of his followers, really aimed at and why they advocated the study of traditional art. These artists wanted to take lessons in swimming from the master swimmers in their own waters before attempting to swim across the sea. The tradition which these artists thought of cultivating is quite different from the mannerism which the inexperienced artist would expound through his work. Mannerism is much like what we call "mudra dosha" in our literature and idiosyncracies in personal habits. An artist's constant and mono-



tonous repetition of a particular feature in all his work, a repetition which mars his further development, may be called mannerism. But on the other hand, tradition is a vast field of ancient heritage without which no art (Fine art or Literature) and consequently no national culture could have a sound foundation. We would not think of asking the Negroes or any aboriginal tribesmen to study their ancient tradition for the simple reason that they do not possess any such thing. Then, there is the outstanding fact that the New World ( America ) inspite of its great scientific progress is lagging behind in the sphere of Art as it wants the backbone of traditional evolution which is the very foundation on which an art could be built up. China, Japan and Europe have got their distinctive types of civilization and their own typical art. There is no such historical background for art in America and so she has to deliberately imitate Europe in every respect; and so far as such imitation in the field of art goes, it has only resulted in lifeless productions. To differentiate Oriental from Occidental art we might note one fundamental point that the former draws its inspiration through the exercise of the imagination just as poetry is conceived and composed, while the latter represents a more realistic school which is rigidly faithful to nature.

Europe had developed her Art through the achievements of Greek, Roman and Italian Art masters over many centuries and has adhered to it up to this day. If one may leave out the work of a small band of experimentalists of the ultra-modern school in Europe, it will be seen that

the models of the ancient Greek, Roman and Italian masters are very freely copied by the students of the Art Schools. Similarly, the student of Indian Art should have a first hand knowledge of his country's art heritage and should thoroughly study its glorious tradition before he could embark upon his own creative adventure. It is up to the art students to assimilate what they have studied, otherwise they would simply mimic ancient art.

In the Oriental countries of China and Japan they are still keeping alive the spirit of their peculiar art tradition and are developing it under foreign influence which to a certain extent is almost unavoidable under modern conditions of easy inter-communication. It was with this ardent hope and desire that Dr. Abanindra Nath Tagore and his disciples turned towards their own country for the revival of Indian art instead of advocating a blind imitation of the style of the Western school. They never thought of deliberately restoring any particular Indian school of painting by laying down any hard and fast rules for the imitation of Ajanta, Moghul, Rajput or any such school. But they did recommend their adoption of the best that could be derived from the study of old masters in the manner of the Western art students mentioned above. It goes without saying that mere copying of a certain style of work either of an ancient or modern master would certainly lead to the development of an unhealthy mannerism and would condemn art students to mediocrity.

Of course, none would advocate mannerism in art. I would certainly not do so. No one in his senses would think seriously of going back to



the Bengal "Pot" painting (folk art) or even to the highly cultured art of Ajanta. But we should as far as possible be true to our own salt and express the inspirational contents of our visions in our own typical medium of expression and ideology. In art teaching someone said "the pupil lights his torch from the same flame to go beyond his master so that his individuality may be stamped on his work." If the teacher imposes mannerism on his pupil's art, he is not a good master and his pupil's art will consequently lose its value.

The meaning of "Tradition" is rather elastic, and is often twisted by the modern art critics to include superstitions and rigid conventions. But to understand the inner meaning of Tradition we must at first know the real meaning of the word "culture." Culture means to 'cultivate', and Tradition is based on and permeated with the cultural heritage of a nation. In other words tradition is the knowledge accumulated through generations of dynamic evolution and progress. Science and art and all other forms of cultural activities depend upon such traditional heritage. No scientist of our time therefore would venture to re-discover the fundamental motive-powers of steam or electricity. Similarly, no sensible artist would care to imitate deliberately children's drawings or a cave-man's scribbles in search for a psychological romance in art.

But an artist with faith in tradition, would surely let the quintessence of past achievements sink into his aesthetic consciousness; and would draw out such guidance and sustenance from it as

would vitalise his own efforts and invest them with the wisdom and excellence of varied expressions.

## HARMONY AND CONTRAST

Around us we see Nature spread forth in one great rhythmic ecstasy. The tall tree in the embraces of the fragile trembling creeper, the great massive mountains rising out of illimitable plains, the ever-changing waters breaking against the hard rock-bound coast, in them all lies a rhythm and a harmony the appreciation of which is the very foundation of human civilization. It was full of this ecstasy that humanity in those dim days of the past, first rose above the mere animal and sang out in rhythmic numbers hymns in praise of creation. Again it was the same feeling for rhythm and harmony which made the ancient Egyptians and Babylonians blend line and colour and create the art of painting.

When the caveman first issued from the darkness of his cave-home and built his little thatched hut on the mountain-side it rhymed in so beautifully with its natural surroundings that it became one with the mountain-side. It is this sense of harmony which is the very source of artistic creation. The sculptor in his piece of sculpture, or the painter in his painting through the harmony of line and colour creates beauty. We can all appreciate the harmony of a song or the cadence of a poem, but that there is a rhythm in the composition of the artist, that this composition is no blind imitation of nature is a thing more difficult to understand; for to obtain this rhythm the artist has to probe down right into



the mystical essence of nature. Yet this rhythm is most unconsciously obtained. Look at that small pathway over the undulating fields to a neighbouring village—it is created from the harmonious beat of a thousand foot-prints of human beings led with the same desire; there are no conscious efforts in it; on the contrary we find it gaily following the natural ups and downs of the field, thus giving us the feeling of rhythmic motion which is in entire harmony with the surrounding country side. How different is this from the paved street of some big city which haughtily ignores the natural unevenness of the ground and moves along levelling down all obstructions that lie in its way.

In a painting it is through the outlines of the various objects and chiaroscuro that its rhythm or harmony is created. But the outlines usually consist of curvilinear form and not straight lines, for it is the curved line which gives grace to the painting. Nature loves curves whether it be in the rippling waters, the swaying forests or the bare mountain-tops, everywhere we see the emotional ecstasy of the curved line. There is a canon in Chinese and Japanese art that the world of nature in its barest outline reduces itself to two concave and convex curves. Thus most forms of nature, whether it be that of a man or a tree can be represented by these two curves joined end to end in the form of a spiral. It is only in the crude handiwork of man that we see the straight line predominating. The artist always tries to avoid straight lines, and even where he has to use them in architecture he embel-

lishes it with decorative motifs or sculpture. If there is a building to be depicted in a painting, the artist will always compose it along with trees, animals, clouds or such other accessories of the surroundings where the curved line is predominant, so that the severe effect of the straight line is softened. The ivy-covered walls of an old European castle or church, the floral decorative carvings of an Indian temple are nothing else but an attempt to relieve the monotony of the straight line in architecture. The curved line not only gives grace and charm to a painting but creates various emotional effects. The infinite effects of the heavens can be produced by means of curves. Again in Indian sculpture or painting certain attitudes (poses) of human figures and gods and goddesses express certain characteristic meanings. These give the artist the opportunity of using certain curves which express certain feelings. We have the "Tribhanga" attitude (pose) of "Krishna" in which the three main curves of the body are emphasised, thus giving us the feeling of infinity in its three dimensions which "Krishna" represents as a god-head. Again the curves of the hands and figures in the various poses, so characteristic of the Ajanta style of painting seem to convey to us a dynamic sense of the divine creation. We have seen that the curved line is a means by which the artist can produce the rhythmic effect in his painting. Sometimes in modern Western painting, especially in Cubism, artistic rhythm is produced even by straight lines; but here too the straight lines must be so arranged as to produce the effect



of a curve. But just as in a piece of music the introduction of a false note jars on the ear, or in a poem the metrical flow is interrupted by the introduction of too long or too short a word, so pictorial harmony may be spoilt by the introduction of lines which do not harmonise with the composition of the picture.

Besides harmony of line in a pictorial composition, the proper regulation of space and the right proportion of the various objects are essential for rhythmic unity. It is the regulation of space and not the size of a picture which gives the sense of largeness or smallness. A painting may be small in actual size, but if the space between the objects is great we have an impression of largeness; but however large a painting may be if the space between the objects is not great we have the effect of smallness. The size of the objects too must be carefully arranged in proper proportion both as regards one another as well as their own various parts. This fact however can only be illustrated through a picture and not by words. Again just as in reading a lyrical poem the mind naturally seeks rest in a rhyme, or in listening to a melody the ear anxiously awaits the note to which the voice returns again and again as if with a caress, so in the composition of the artist, the eye seeks naturally for the rhyming lines without which the picture would lack balance. It is this combination of proportion and balance which creates a rhythmic harmony.

The rhythmic sense and harmony is not to be found in art only, though it may attain perfection there; it is also present everywhere in Nature.

It is to be found in the movement of a man, in the flight of birds, in the growth of trees. Who has not seen the rhythmic flight of a flock of birds over a river swaying and curvetting to keep in tune with its bends and curves, or who has not noticed the harmony in a grove of trees whose branches and leaves fit in so exquisitely with one another that they form a rhythmic whole so clearly set off against the surroundings?

So much for rhythm and harmony. But just as in the external world a contrast stands against life and gives a variety to it, so in a painting there must be contrast, the element of surprise which gives a special tone to it. We have seen that rhythm depends mainly on outline but contrast depends on the arrangement of colour also. Just as flowers light up and beautify a tree, so suitable technique lends charm to a painting; and it is through proper manipulation of the colour scheme in a painting that life and tone are given to it. Contrast in colouring is one of the chief instruments of the artist in imparting suitable tone-value to his painting. Very often we come across a delicately coloured and harmonious painting lacking life and distinction. The reason is that it is painted deliberately in harmonious semitone colours. On the otherhand colour contrast is not required to show up the various colours. Everywhere in nature we find this contrast. But in nature it is mainly in the form of light and shade. There must be light to throw shadow, and it is shadow which shows up light. In order to give distinctness and definiteness to an object there must be a contrast, light against shade or



shade against light. In European art, the artist studies the effect of light and shade in nature and then reproduces it in his art. In Indian art, the artist on the other hand has only taken the principle and uses it in the form of colour contrast in order to show up certain features in his painting. Imagine a dark night and a solitary traveller making his way with the help of a torch along the steep side of a mountain. Before he arrives at the top, suddenly dawn appears and overtakes him; the torch falls from his hands and the rosy beams of the rising sun light up the whole scene lending awe-inspiring form and animation to it. Here in a metaphor we have the effect of colour contrast in painting. Just as the contrast of the light penetrating the darkness shows up the scene, so contrast in colour lights up and produces form and beauty in a picture. Discovery of photography has liberated the modern painters of Europe from analysis of light and shade in nature relief and chiaroscuro of the Renaissance school. Modern painters have at last taken due consideration of the fact "a picture is a plane surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order." (Maurice Denis).

Rhythm and harmony in a painting give us the sense of peace and enjoyment, contrast introduces the element of surprise and emotion. A sudden shiver disturbing the calm slumber of a child as it rests on its mother's lap, the sudden flight of a flock of birds sporting in the meadows, these opposite movements in nature give the same effect as contrast in colour gives us in a picture.

This element of surprise is introduced in

various ways. It may come in the form of sudden contrast in a subject matter. We have a palace in sleep, the soft rays of the moon, people resting on golden beds, not a sound anywhere; suddenly a demon appears with eerie shrieks and waves his wand, and the whole palace is full of noise and action. Here in the folklore we have the effect of contrast in subject matter. In art too we see it in the works of the ancient artists at Bagh and Ajanta. In the Bagh caves there is a picture of the deep grief of a queen and next to it the picture of an animated crowd engaged in joyous song and dance. This sudden change in subject emphasises all the more the bitterness of the queen's grief. In the Ajanta caves again we have the picture of the Buddha preaching to his disciples, and next to it the scene of luxury and mad enjoyment in the inner rooms of the palace. It is possible to use this form of contrast in subject matter in cave-paintings, because though each painting is complete in itself, the whole is linked together and forms a huge panorama. It is like the different scenes which go to make up a drama. But even in a single painting it is possible to have this method of contrast. The artists of the Orient (Chinese and Japanese) make good use of it in their painting compositions. For instance we have a picture of spring, cherry blossoms everywhere, and a sense of joy pervading both man and nature. Suddenly riding on a horse at a terrible speed comes an envoy bringing the news of battle. The sudden element of fear only emphasises the happiness of the atmosphere in spring; and to accentuate the sense of contrast the



artist adds a butterfly at the hoof of the steed which follows persistently attracted by the scent of trodden flowers. Once more in a Chinese painting we have a scene of battle, the clash of armies, houses on fire, rivers flowing with blood, all creating an atmosphere of terror and cruelty and the horror of the scene all the more emphasised by the peace reigning in a cloudless sky and a full moon shedding its soft lustre over the earth.

Even in small everyday happenings contrast is what inspires the artist. He feels the rhythm of things and by the introduction of a sudden element of surprise turns the key of our imagination and lets it wander forth in glad freedom. For instance, we have the picture of a village girl going with her empty pitcher to fill water. Suddenly she observes a lovely lotus and leaving her empty pitcher on the stone steps wades out to pick the flower. This sudden touch of fancy in the midst of common work gives our imagination a scope for thinking. In another picture we see a village girl going with basket to the market place, but suddenly attracted by the sound of a flute, puts down her basket and listens absorbed in the flute music.

Besides contrast of subject matter the artist uses contrast of colour to enhance the effect of his painting. This depends chiefly on the arrangement of tone-values. For instance, blue with its impression of distance can be described as a soft tone hardening gradually into green, yellow and brown. Thus if there is a predominance of brown in a painting, splashes of blue or one of the softer tone on colour will relieve the hard effect

by adding suitable contrast, or if a picture is painted mainly in soft tones, a hard colour effect is necessary to give it stamina. We see this contrast in the colour scheme of nature. The green grass with yellow, blue and pink flowers blooming in its midst, the brown earth covered with variegated vegetation, the green branches spreading against the blue sky, all these contrasted with each other give greater vividness to the scene.

Even in decorative design, where rhythm and symmetry are most important, the artist uses contrast to heighten the rhythmic effect of the design. The rhythmic flow of a decorative scroll is all the more emphasised by the straight lines of a geometrical pattern placed in between. This kind of use of straight lines is not confined to designs only. We have it sometimes in nature also. Who has not noticed a small Indian village hidden amidst foliage with its curving thatched roofs rhyming with the curves of the tops of the trees and here and there the straight tall palm trees emphasising the rhythmic effect of the scene. Thus a rhythmic contrast in outline is attained by the alternation of the flowing curve with the dead effect of the straight line.

In a painting, therefore, both harmony and contrast are essential and it is the delicate adjustment of the artist which without creating a clash gives emphasis and distinction to the painting.



## TWO TESTS OF ART

The first test of all art is that it is not something static like a piece of stone. Whether it is a painting on a canvas, or is represented on stone, brick, wood or anything else, if a work of art does not express this dynamic quality adequately, it is not worthy of its name. In the Shilpa-Shastras there are references to the sixty-four creative arts. In those days such creative arts used to be taught with great care to all. A princess and her maid were equally qualified to paint pictures. With the advent of Victorian era and by reason of modern western education, by fine art we came to mean chiefly painting, sculpture and architecture completing the pentad of art by including music and poetry. All other forms of art we now designate as the "minor arts" or "arts and crafts."

If we consider the subject depicted in a painting in its dynamic aspect, we shall find evidence of two different kinds of expression. In the one imagination is preponderant, while the other is realistic. When we stand before a painting, it takes us right into the scene depicted and we forget all about the room or place where we actually are. This is another test of art. Besides, the more an artistic production holds our mind and stirs our thoughts, the greater is its worth. The literal meaning of '*chitra*' painting is '*ashcharya*' surprise. So it has been seen that many people found solace in their sorrow by looking at a painting.

In the old treatises on art there are references to nine '*rasas*' (i. e. great tastes). It is the work of the artist to bring these to our mind, although some people may consider art as superfluous embellishment. The architect builds houses to create suitable environment in such a way as may broaden the outlook and standard of life and thus spiritually uplift people's minds. The sculptor creates forms out of earth, stone, metal, etc., through which various human mobile moods take permanent shapes. All these apparently lifeless objects can be endowed with life spirit by an artist and made to speak all that is in his mind.

The creation of an artist reflects all the aspects of his own mind. The ego of the artist is embodied in the object. It is the artist's mind which is behind the stone and the chisel that makes the piece of sculpture a thing real and attractive in its appeal. In the domain of painting also there are two kinds of artists; one is a realist and the other of an imaginative type. A realist would arrange in his mind whatever beauty he perceives in nature and then deliberately copy it out on his canvas. Landscapes and portraits of the western schools are good examples of such realistic art. The imaginative form of art embodies impressions of objects observed or created purely out of one's inner urge and intuition. Oriental artists are followers of the imaginative style.

Art has a dynamic quality and the artist's mind is the source of it. It is also seen that when the mind of the artist becomes weak and imitative his imagination also fades away. Then he goes on seeking after the various styles and mannerisms



of the other artist's work so that he may easily copy them. In the name of experiment, he goes on adopting the style of the Bengal 'pat' (folk-art), or of the European ultra modernists or the Chinese style. On the other hand Indian style of painting is strictly imaginative and as such extremely difficult to follow. The great master artist Dr. Abanindranath Tagore revealed to us the mystery of the art tradition of our country, many have adopted it. But others we see, even after their initiation finding it rather difficult, leaving it and going back to the realistic western methods viz. landscape and portrait painting.

We often notice in our periodicals reproductions of such work. Some of them are positively ugly. They bear testimony to one fact, namely, that they are not drawn with adequate care. If we see with them some unfinished picture by Cezanna or Van Gogh, we feel that the lines from the artist's brush which show an extraordinary power and movement have, in course of a forceful expression, come suddenly to a stop. The one gives evidence of a challenge in the artist's mind to depict a novelty, the other is a free expression of the mind. The one indicates poverty of the mind, the other testifies to a remarkable wakefulness. Man has both the sleeping and a waking behaviours. When he is asleep, he does not know where he is, as his mental machinery is not working then. Then again, there may be a state in which a person, even though awake, sends his mind far beyond his bodily existence by trance or meditation; this '*turiya*' state is known to the '*yogis*'. When a person attains this state, there does not remain for

him the necessity of giving shape to a materialistic thing. That is why the work of artists expresses much more of their waking state. What we call abstract art, is the embodiment of shapes and postures of which we may get intimations in the land of dreams during our sleep. Sometimes in our dreams we seek to visualize strange and grotesque shapes which it is possible for us to portray in abstract art.

Therefore, we see that in the case of all genuine art, the mind of the artist finds expression and the merits of the work can be judged through its sincere dynamic quality.

Looking at the matter historically, in the paintings of the primitive people we get a record of their danger-ridden life in the scenes of hunting portrayed by them. In the ancient paintings, both of the east and west, we similarly find evidence of a religious spirit moulded in an environment of religious restrictions. In Europe today, an extraordinary type of new art has appeared (at the beginning of the twentieth century) due to the hold that science of psychology has taken on the human mind. Now-a-days, when the artist carves a figure on stone or on a piece of wood, he does not think of the subject matter he wants to represent in his work, but he thinks more of the natural shape and texture of the medium itself. In this way his subject-matter of course suffers. If the carving has to be done on hard granite, for instance, the sculptor would design the shape of his figure in such a way as would express the special characteristics of granite stone. The expression of the figure itself would occupy only a second place. So also



in painting, the artist takes pains to find out the inner structure of matter as conceived and discovered by scientists and moulds the subject-matter of his painting accordingly. Thus, the prism-form in cubism, is in reality an attempt at a crystalline representation of things in their primitive state. The modern architect designs the outer shape of the house on scientific principles, with a view to keeping out dust, smoke etc. Such changes in the mentality of man take place at every age and art also keeps pace with them. Even in an ordinary painting, by observing the scheme of lines and colours one can say how much of the wakeful spirit is behind it and how much of the sleeping state.

A third way in which we can see the artist's mind working is in the sphere of technique. For example, take the question of the clarity that the lines and colours have imparted to the subject represented. In this matter, the artist seeks to know the observer within himself; he finds out how he should arrange his lines in a rhythmic discipline, so that the intrinsic beauty of the painting would be best appreciated. Again from experience the artist knows that if his painting contains a mass of indisciplined lines, it becomes static. In the matter of colouring also he knows that, just as, if we put the sky below in a painting and the earth above the balance is lost; even so in painting one cannot put a dark colour above and a lighter one below. This balance in art cannot be taught. Every artist has to keep his mind prepared to understand it according to his own experiences. Fourthly, the material, country,

race, social order and economic factor often work through the artist's mind and reflect themselves in the artist's work.

The question of individual likes and dislikes is also involved in graphic art. All may not perhaps agree to accept certain works of art. With reference to some particular colours even one may say "I don't like brown;" another, "I don't like red;" and so on. But the artist is not concerned with such criticism. Modern Europe is giving up one by one the rigid canons of art of the Victorian age. Unlike the artists of those days, first of all they are now almost completely ignoring the subject matter of the paintings. This treatment is very similar to that of a picture painted on a carpet or a curtain, in which we do not take any cognizance of the subject-matter, but only see if the design is appealing to our eyes, and properly executed. The picture itself is only the background here, on which one attempts to arrange certain lines and colours. Such lines and colours may not be arranged in a symmetrical and rhythmical pattern. (see Maurice Denis's remarks on modern art page 18 of this book.) Such changes of views with regard to art are the outcome of the economic and commercial bent of mind of the present war-ridden world. It is the quantity and not the quality that is required these days. For, if the painting is not made to suit some pattern of crafts the latter can have no novelty in design; and these modern paintings, drawn without adequate thought and training supply the want of such novelty.

On the other hand, if a painter has a scientific mind, and attaches more importance to what



he actually knows rather than what he sees in nature, then the science of perspective invented in painting to show the distant views of the objects will have to be discarded. Objects situated further away from our sight look smaller than nearer ones, though in our intellectual minds we may be fully aware that the former is much larger than the latter. This is indeed a most favourable argument for the ultra-modern surrealist to discard perspective. In all artistic creations we find the artist's mind and if we judge it by our own mind only, with our preconceived ideas, we shall for ever fail to grasp it. Through the artist's work we get a glimpse of his psychology, as he remains one with his creation.

It is the commercial artist who has to think of the means to bring his work within easy reach of everybody's mind. But in doing so, he has generally to go far away from what he himself has to give. That is the reason why many artists draw or carve in a detached way without bothering whether others would like their work or not. Wherever the artist has had to follow certain religious conventions, we notice their restrictions manifested in his work. In the Byzantine school of painting in Europe, as also in our ancient Jain, Buddhist and Hindu art the psychology of the priest is visible. As the religious creeds of Hinduism do not preach a fixed dogma and depend mainly upon individual spiritual experiences, artists have open mind and unfettered freedom of expressions. Even in the art of Renaissance school of Europe known so long as romantic art, a dogma was apparent; and it is from this that the modern artists are



trying to free themselves by seeking to bring in some novelty in their work by means of varieties of experiments outside the recognized style.

Man's mind cannot remain fixed for ever on one idea alone for its support. One can easily observe what great changes take place in a man's life time. So also in the ideology of art we find how dynamic the minds of artists are. It is indeed an interesting thing to note how one style springs out of another in a new form. In ancient Europe, Byzantine art, which followed Oriental art in its simplicity in execution, became a great support of religion, and showed one aspect of art; then the realists came and broke all links with their predecessors. Again a change came over these realists and an impressionist school was established as early as 1874 by Turner, Monet and Cezanne. They tried to express the object of nature with an easy stroke of a brush. Futurism was originated in Italy during 1911 to 1915. Marinetti was a rebel against harmony and good taste. Similarly abstractionism was an offspring of Cubistic school in 1909 and Dadaism sprang up in Switzerland in 1917. But the artist's mind did not stop here. In 1924 a scientifically minded artist, a physician (Andre Breton) tried to see art from the point of view of psychology and founded the Surrealist School. He found his hints in crude forms of paintings and drawings made by the children or images made by the barbarous people and began making experiments on those lines.\* In this way, the active mind of the

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\* Vide "Experimental Psychology and modern Painting" by Donald A. Gordon (The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, March, 1951. Vol IX No. 3.)

artist is leading art into so many channels, and will do so in future to an inconceivable extent.

It has already been pointed out that the mind of the artist undergoes changes according to his environment. This can be tested very well in the drawings made by the children, because impressions are much deeper on their simple minds. I know of a five year old girl who is fond of drawing pictures. Her especial liking is for the picture of beasts and the cat is among her hot favourites. So, when she draws a human figure very often it is seen that its limbs resemble those of the cat. Similarly the drawing of a boy who likes railway trains will bear their stamp to some extent. With the growth of the mind, the style and subject-matter of painting would change. It has been found with some great actors that owing to the fact that their childhood was spent in the rural country they could not altogether get over a rusticity in their speech and manners. Similarly it can be observed in the works of artists and sculptors how gradually their tastes have unfolded themselves with the development of their mind.

In order to understand the artist, one should try to know him through his mind revealed in his works. It is not possible to judge him by the width of his works or variety of his technique. An artist can learn technique from outside sources, but the imaginative faculty can develop only through experiment and cultural refinement of his mind. That is why if art is judged in terms of this mental outlook, one can always form an estimate of the wealth or poverty of the artist's conception. In the present



commercialised world, people attempt to pass conventional patterns as works of art. There is a limitation in that, whereas there is no limit to art so far as it is inspired by imagination. Therefore we find that the spirit of Kalidasa's "Meghduta" has been expressed in an immortal way by Shailendranath Dey, that of the Vaishnava poets, by Kshitindranath Mazumdar and that again of our mythologies by Nandalal Bose. But even above the historical spirit we find that Abanindranath Tagore has invested imagination with its own real power.

We must not forget that the approach to art after Byzantine or Gothic school of paintings (on which artists never put their signature) became personal and that in the days of the Renaissance, a scientific approach to nature and perspective were invented. Evaluation of art, artists and experiences in art since then underwent a great change, and psychological science has now come to liberate western art from its previous realistic scientific approach. In this manner art is going outside the pale of aesthetics in the west. Though a set of scholar-critics of Europe are eager to add such scientific value in art, the naturalistic school (especially in landscape and portrait) never ceased to exist. The beauty of Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper" has in no way changed, though sometimes under-valued by the science-cum-art minded European critics. For in this kind of painting one can easily have an access into the mind of the artist in spite of its subject matter being borrowed from the Gospel. Whereas, to understand a surrealist work one must be educated in a scientific analytical



standard laid down by a set of scholar-critics. In this way, art is going to become a chequerboard of scientific formulas and not a mental vision transmitting mystical experiences and translating the phenomena of life and nature;—age old ideals in which Indian art has always found its *Gangotri* of inspiration in spite of its many foreign impacts.

## ARTS AND CRAFTS

There are many who would not like to place crafts in the category of arts. They seem to think that by 'arts' are meant only painting and sculpture and that crafts are no better than any productions of skilled workmen. Let me therefore, first of all, try to remove such misunderstanding that prevail in the minds of our people. The first confusion is about the words "arts and crafts." There is very little difference in the significance of the words "arts" and "arts and crafts." "Arts and crafts" is a phrase which includes the art of design and handicrafts—all those arts which go to the making of the house beautiful. The phrase had its origin in the revival of arts and handicrafts which began in England in 1875. The growth of the factory system and industrial revolution with specialized functions for each workman had almost destroyed the feeling for art among people. Hence, the movement was started by William Morris to rescue the public taste from cheap imitation of foreign models, to encourage handicrafts and to raise them to their rightful position in the category of fine arts. It was in his hand that plastic art revived in its former glory. His conviction may thus be quoted in his own language.

"What I mean by art is some creation of man which appeals to his emotions and his intellect by means of his senses."

"We have two kinds of art: one of them

would exist even if men had no needs, but such as are essentially spiritual, and only accidentally material or bodily. The other kind, called into existence by material needs, is bound no less to recognise the aspirations of the soul and receive the impress of its striving towards perfection.

“Not only is it possible to make the matters needful to our daily life in works of art, but there is something wrong in the civilization which does not do this; if our houses, our clothes, our household furniture and utensils are not works of art they are either wretched makeshifts or what is worse, degrading shams of better things.”

The truth underlying his conviction is not to be understood with reference to William Morris's country only. It might equally be applied to any other country's art particularly to India, where for very many reasons the artistic conscience of the people has degenerated. Thus the word 'art' in a broad sense of the term now refers to anything which is not an immediate product of nature, but is artificial and made by the aid of human dexterity. We seem to think that in crafts, the hand is better employed than the head; but a cursory glance into the history of arts of India, Egypt and Europe will at once convince us that the artists who painted wonderful paintings and produced fine works of sculpture also took great pains in exercising this skill in beautifying the objects of ordinary use such as furniture, utensils, vases, carpets, tapestries and articles of jewellery. Art is not confined only to the brush and paints. A true artist has his eye on every beautiful object and it is folly to divide the artistic activities into



watertight compartments. On the other hand, a mere skilled craftsman is not competent to create things of beauty, and as long as he is not an artist and does not fashion articles of good taste, he is a machine multiplying the work of his fore-fathers.

Thus it is only for the sake of convenience that art is classified into "useful" or "applied arts" on the one hand and "fine arts" on the other. The latter embrace painting, sculpture, architecture and music; and according to some, even poetry. Pottery, brasswork, silver work are classified as useful or "applied arts." These latter could be practised by anyone who had hereditary skill and acquired the necessary talents or the requisite training. In handicraft, however clever the craftsman may be, it is absolutely impossible for him to manufacture two articles identically alike. This is one of the reasons why artistic handicraft is classed as "fine art," and connoisseur like William Morris called it "arts and crafts."

A piece of work should have design and aesthetic appeal without which it can only have a commercial value, but will have no intrinsic value as an object of "art." If the design and aesthetic appeal are taken out of it, the term "artware" or "arts and crafts" cannot be applied. Design and aesthetic appeal are the very essence of "fine art." Similarly an artist who has devoted his life to only painting pictures cannot be blind to the beauties of objects of high craftsmanship. Moreover, no artist would care to see his work placed in such material surroundings as do not fit in his painting properly. Even a picture or a piece of sculpture must need be supported by crafts and

their environment. This close dependence between crafts and fine art is as old as society. In the pre-historic ages the primitives had also thoughts of beautifying their surroundings and house-hold objects. The human instinct for self-adornment was responsible for discovering ornaments in crude forms of beads and stones, which developed into fine jewelleries of the day. Later on, probably these primitive men attached other significance to these ornaments and used them as symbols in their daily rituals. But originally, it may be asserted, these crafts-objects were vehicles of aesthetic satisfaction. The sense of beauty thus achieved in the bygone days can be traced in the pre-historic works of art found in Peruvia, Egypt, Babylonia, Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. In such practical objects as ancient flints, we notice all kinds of decorations, and the difficulty of engraving them on hard piece of stone in those remote days can better be imagined than described. In Mohanjo-Daro (in India) we find well cut beads and ornaments the workmanship of which still puzzle the modern man. These ancient art relics reveal to us the real urge for creation and dynamic rhythm, which is sadly lacking in so called great modern achievements of art. Those primitives had no civilisation worth speaking of, and yet we find expressions of art-culture in their crude handiwork. No distinction between Fine Art and Arts and Crafts was then thought of.

The process of evolution of the human mind and skill can be traced through these relics of the pre-historic "arts and crafts." Thus a broken pitcher found in an ancient site would tell a long



tale of the ancient thought and culture of a people. For instance, pottery is one of the most ancient handicrafts in the world and its evolution traces the regeneration or the progress of the whole human civilisation. The crude beginning of earthen pots which we find among the primitives gradually led on to the highly artistic glazed pottery of Egypt, Persia and finally reached its perfection as fine porcelain in China which can be rightly classed as "fine arts" or "arts and crafts." Originally porcelain was invented in China and subsequently it found its way through Persia to the different parts of the world. It is a great discipline for other people to copy them and many devoted their lives to achieve perfection in that art, with the result that porcelain-ware became so cheap as to find itself in every household. In this way the natural evolution of only a useful object i. e., a craft-product, ended in shaping out a perfect piece of Fine art.

The second confusion is about the origins of our indigenous art forms. There is an idea current among our people that all such origins are native to the soil. But this is falsified by the history of India. Many nations were attracted by the magnificence and wealth of India; Huns, Greeks and other foreigners attacked India several times with the result that there was a constant inter-mixture of foreign culture, tradition and ideas. India imbibed various cultures, particularly new ideas about "arts and crafts." Indian workmen were never inveterate copyists, but were clever adopters. It is widely held by the historians that from the very pre-historic ages foreigners came from Asia



Minor to India for trade and commerce and used to exchange goods and commodities in Egypt and Persia. The origins of inlay work on ivory, gold and silver etc. or Damascene work of Northern India are still in the dark. It is difficult to state whether they were invented in India by the Indians in ancient times or in the mediaeval period or whether we got them as a result of periodical association with foreigners in some by gone days. Similar is the case with the art of painting on cloth or filigree work.

Such exchange of art culture has happened practically in all countries all over the world. Early European art was obviously influenced by the Egyptian and Persian, and European scholars themselves acknowledge the debt. To-day also we find Chinese and Japanese influence in the decoration of houses in Europe. The easy and simple elegance of house decoration and furniture of Japan is easily traceable in the modern style of a European home. Similarly in the period when Buddhism was expanding beyond the frontiers of India, we clearly find traces of Indian culture and art in central Asia, China, Java and Japan. Chinese contribution in Persian art is similarly distinctly traceable. It is therefore very difficult to estimate a nation's contribution to another in the development and gradual evolution of its civilization, art and culture. One can never say to what extent one nation is indebted to another. It is through adaptation by the native talents to the local motifs and designs that culture and art are nationalized. This association with foreign culture, tradition and interchange of

ideas since time immemorial seems to be a plausible reason for the wonderful variety in Indian arts and crafts. Art cannot be confined within the boundaries of a country. It is always impelled forward by a double impulse of liberation and confluence of liberation from all tyrannies that would tie it down to a particular Politico-Geographical unit, and confluence with all sister-currents enriching the patterns in alien lands.

Machinery and quick transport were unknown in olden times. This led to limited markets. The famous muslin, brocade, ivory work etc. of India thus retained their appeal and were accordingly appreciated both in India and abroad. We know from history that European statesmen and economists were alarmed at the enormous transshipment of their gold to India in exchange for Indian art-wares. India's geographical situation was not clearly known to the western world in those days and it was these art-wares that offered them a glimpse of India thousand of miles away.

Moreover, the Indian village organization was highly favourable to the development of arts and crafts. Before the advent of machine-made products, each Indian village was a self sufficient economic unit. The villagers produced everything that they had need of, according to the economic organization of such village; each worker received his remuneration in grains. Naturally the village artist and craftsmen had no anxieties for their living, for the village system made sufficient provision for it. In exchange for their art-ware and commodities of general requirement, they enjoyed rent-free lands or other remunerations from their peasant



customers. The design and shape of commodities produced by these people depended not only upon the social customs and traditions of the village, but were also determined by religious conventions. Copper, brass and silver pots for marriage-gifts were designed and executed according to the standard models definitely laid down by religious requirement for such occasions. In rural areas, there were different localities for different kinds of artists and craftsmen; for example copper-smiths, braziers, weavers, etc. Similar was the organization in towns and cities.

It was also the custom among the rich men in India, to call the craftsmen and artists to their own houses and to get their artistic objects executed under their own guidance. Sometimes such patrons would even suggest changes to the artists in standard models and designs. Thus the artisans were supplied with new and beautiful designs and so deviation from the usual course was possible.

It is well known that Akbar, the Great, directed the whole construction of his palace and adjoining gardens to the minutest details. He took great delight in spending his leisure hours with the artists while they were at work. Shah Jehan had the famous Taj Mahal executed under his direct supervision. It was this great interest in arts of the Moghuls which excited the admiration of the foreign merchants and ambassadors. We know much about Indian art and artists of the Moghul period from the contemporary European travellers. Bernier's account of 1656 throws much light on the subject. There was a particular day



when the Emperor used to sit in *Dewan-i-khas* with his lords and *Umrahs* for the selection of the best foreign art-wares. Various kinds of articles from various parts of the world were brought before him. If perchance he took fancy to a certain piece of art-ware, he would ask the local artists to make a similar one for him. Thus there was a constant flow and intermixture of foreign and indigenous arts during the Moghul period. In a fusion of culture like this much that was bad, was also copied. Moreover, every year there used to be a *Nou-Roz* fair to celebrate the new year festival in which craftsmen and artists used to bring their best art-products for sale before the Emperor. There used to be a strong competition among the artists to please the Emperor and such active royal interest helped the progress of arts and crafts. It has become proverbial to speak of the exquisitely fine workmanship of Shah Jehan's Peacock Throne. An artist, if he could attract the royal notice for his works, would get *Jagirs* and a monthly allowance for his family which would be transmitted from generation to generation. In this way the hereditary and class-artists were also patronized in Hindu-Buddhist times. The system was very helpful to the growth of arts and crafts, as it became a family profession for generations; with the result that such artists attained a very high degree of specialization and perfection.

With the advent of Victorian era, regrettable lack of patronage and utter indifference of our rich men to the indigenous arts were responsible for gradually dying out of high class artistic productions for which India was once so famous.

These rich men would sooner buy worthless foreign articles. Their gardens and houses are decorated with disgusting marble figures and fountain-heads imported from foreign countries. Their thrones, coronets, dress and jewellery remind us of a comic theatrical performance. In former times the Rajas and Maharajas thought it was their duty to gather together renowned artists, musicians, craftsmen, and poets round their courts, and they used to take pride in excelling one another with the display of the work of the men of genius attached to them. While now-a-days, if things do not smack of foreign glamour, or are not admired by foreigners, even the poorest of the poor of our people will see no merit in our own indigenous things. Silk handkerchiefs of Murshidabad, when they found a place in the pocket of the late Lord Charmichael began to be appreciated by our men as "charmichael handkerchiefs." Dr. Rabindra nath Tagore's books written in Bengali language used to be eaten by worms in Calcutta book-stalls before he was awarded the Nobel Prize. The real artists in these times some how eke out a living by catering to a few interested in the things of the spirit. Otherwise, the beautiful specimens of art-work live a dead-life in the glass-cases of museums.

Apart from direct patronage and other kinds of support, the artists primarily get inspiration for this work from Nature and secondarily from national cultural heritage. Nature indeed supplies the inspiration for the conception of design; for an artist always tries to imbibe all that is beautiful, grand and noble in Nature, he makes them his



very own, and then re-shapes and re-models their expression in his own creation. This is the joy of creation, which is another explanation for the transformation in the artist's imagination of natural objects sometimes beyond recognition.

We shall now give certain illustrations which will show the diffusion of motifs among nations, their dependence upon local environment and traditions. They will also indicate the transformation that occurs in their process of operation. In ancient India, people conceived the world in terms of lotus. Artists have given different interpretations of this lotus motif and have given expression to it in innumerable modes and fashions in their creation. The numerous forms and designs of the lotus have found their ways into places like Java, Bali, Cambodia, Siam, where Indian culture and art have found admission. Even now in the pottery of the above mentioned places we find a variety of lotus designs. Similarly we perceive an abundant variety in the shape and design of the lily in Egypt. All these kinds of artistic designs of lily and lotus do not actually coincide with the real lotus or lily. Artists of both countries have only taken the internal outline and spirit of these flowers as their basis and given expression to their various artistic conceptions thereof.

In China, the dragon is a common design abundantly found in commodities of daily use. The theme has been heavily worked out, so much so that when designed for a royal article the dragon claws have five nails, in the case of royal representatives they have four, and for the



commons, three nails only. Many motifs of design are inspired in Bengal from local commonplace objects viz: cornseeds " cowries " myrobalans, fish, my earthenpot and other commodities. Every country has its traditional arts symbols handed down from generation to generation. Sometimes, owing to excessive use of these art-symbols in the works of arts and crafts, the work becomes cumbersome. For ages Persian carpets have been bearing their characteristic symbols like the cypress. Similarly we recognize a piece of Indian art by the peculiarity of its own treatment of symbols and the general artistic conception. In this way we can distinguish between the works of various places of their origin by their special features and symbols.

The predominating feature of all such craft designs is in the sense of dynamic rhythm. From very early times in Bengal, in ritual ceremonies, a particular kind of floor decoration (*alpona*) done with rice-paste by the ladies, has been used. These ritualistic art of *alpona* convey a rich rhythmic sense. The rhythm in fine art though not clearly perceptible as in poetry, can still be felt. A flow of a stream or a fountain if looked at it too closely, would yield a rhythmic grace to one who has got one's sense for rhythm. A group of trees sometimes spread their branches in such a manner as would suggest rhythm and balance to the poets and artists, though the spreading might have been due to a certain physical situation of the grove. The artists, however is not immediately concerned with them. His primary interest is rhythm. This rhythm is the essence of creative force and ima-

gination of an artist. This sense of rhythm is the source of delight to the artist and its absence brings discord. There is energy and force dormant in things which apparently seem static. Man's creation is never striving for perfection. Man's continual struggle for the attainment of perfection is a quality which democrates him from the rest of creatures and is the cause of his superiority. Therefore art which best expresses this striving, is the most distinguishing human quality.

If art is a human quality, what is the relation between the artist and other human beings? An artist's creation is not meant for public recreation alone, but is the expression of an internal urge for creation. To quote clive Bell. "Art should not come to people, but people should come to art or leave it alone." Artists and art connoisseurs can discriminate, perceive and appreciate a work of art better than ordinary people who have hardly any occassion to get a requisite technical training. There is no royal road to understand and appreciate a work of art but it can only be perceived by one who has cultivated sympathetic understanding for it. No doubt art is a universal language and has an appeal for all. But it makes special demands from its likely devotees.

Unfortunately, in our country, the art sense is gradually diminishing. The reasons, in our opinion, are first, handicraft stands in competition with machine made products. Secondly, the education we receive at homes, schools, colleges and in the Universities sadly fails in developing the true Indian culture and that is the reason why



we cannot understand the inner significance of our art. People rush towards cheap machine-made trifles, which come to India from abroad as so-called objects of art. Consequently the hereditary craftsmen are left unemployed and find their living in mills and large scale factories, totally abandoning their professions which once found favour in the country and abroad. People have little regard for the dignity of labour of our artists and craftsmen. Naturally they are inclined to go in for general education for attaining position and respect in the new social order. Those who, are still persisting in their respective hereditary handicrafts care more for the increased demand of the market rather than for quality. These handicrafts do not find favour in the Indian market for they have lost their former quality and fineness but have attained only a "curio" value in foreign lands. That is the reason why the manufacturers only look to the demand of the foreign market for their productions. Consequently we notice a rapid degradation of our arts and crafts. As our craftsmen and manufacturers have to depend to a very large extent on the demands of foreign markets, naturally they have to some times modify design and shape according to foreign tastes. This is also one of the reasons for the deterioration of the quality of design. Unless a taste for a country's art is developed among her people, nothing solid can be achieved in the way of a revival. The example of Japan in this connection is very appropriate and full of significance. They have preserved their indigenous art, through cottage industries in their home lands, and for



foreign export they manufacture cheap, shoddy articles in large scales factories with the aid of machinery. The result is that even from the economic point of view they are not losers but gainers.

If we could realize the above points and wish popularize Indian handicrafts in India, we might work it up in the following ways: (1) arranging Exhibitions of old Indian handicrafts periodically in the cities and rural areas which are already kept in the various Provincial museums; (2) awarding prizes in annual exhibitions of new products to encourage novel ideas in the designs of the handicrafts in keeping with the modern requirement and taste; (3) giving lantern lectures based on comparative study of Indian and foreign handicrafts with slides or cinema shows; (4) establishing handicrafts associations in various rural and urban centres, which would facilitate to place orders to the craftsmen for beautiful designs and thus help to popularize those products; (5) making catalogues of designs of various handicrafts (both old and new.); (6) publishing illustrated articles about handicrafts in various magazines and journals in different provincial languages in order to create a taste for these articles.

Lord Eustace Percy, M. P. President of the Board of Education in an address to the members of the National Society of Art Masters deplored the tragedy of art education in England at the present time. He said: "If we were to meet the demand which was increasingly being made by industry for a higher standard of industrial art, we could only do so by improving

first of all our education for the fine arts. Education for commerce and industry was not the end from which to approach the problem of art education. One of the dangers was that art education might be regarded too much as the hand-maid of industry." He suggested that "the only direction from which we could usefully approach the problem was the direction of education in fine arts. Broadly speaking, the nation would have a higher standard of industrial art if it had a great school in the fine arts. If we had a national school of painting, sculpture, and architecture, its influence would be felt throughout all the art schools and every branch of industry."

Lord Curzon in his Indian Educational Policy (being a resolution issued by the Governor General in Council, on the 11th March, 1904) clearly stated the cardinal principles regarding provincial Schools of Art in British India:—

"The Government of India are of opinion that the true function of Indian Schools of art is the encouragement of Indian Art and art industries, and that in so far as they fail to promote these arts or industries or provide a training that is dissociated from their future practice, or are utilized as commercial ventures, they are conducted upon erroneous principles. Instruction of these arts or art industries (In the Schools of art) should be directed to their expansion through the improvement of the skill and capacity of the pupil or workman, but it should not be pushed to the point of competing with local industries of doing within the school



what can equally well be done outside or of usurping the sphere of private enterprise. The schools should not be converted into shops, nor should the officers of the Education Department be responsible for extensive commercial transactions."

The influence of fine art in life is very great. Even grotesque and capricious works of modern European artists such as Picasso, Paul Klee, Gris and others have exerted their influence over the manufacturers of carpet and furniture of Europe. Their creation lose grotesqueness when their applications are seen in handicrafts. Similarly artists of Bengal (of the renaissance school) have already exerted their influence in the matter of lady's dress in other provinces. Since the incoming of European merchants and traders there has been a gradual change in the household decorations and furniture etc., of our country.

The primary aim of manufacturing modern conveyances such as motor cars, aeroplanes railway carriages, ships, etc., is their great utility. But today we perceive that even in such things of utility there is a craving for art in design and shape. Manufacturers are even striving for an improvement in design and shape. There is a school of people who think that art has no place in the modern scientific world, but that opinion is no longer tenable. Man has constant craving for change and that is why man's civilization is dynamic. The world would have remained static for ages if the art-urge had been absent. This art-urge is the chief agency for development of civilization and culture.



Extension without depth is indeed death. In our new era, a blind attachment to traditions will however, lead to disastrous result. At the same time without tradition all products will be like a rootless tree. If we merely copy the ancient works of art without producing new design it will again be a work of multiplication instead of creation. In the course of civilization tastes have differed, knowledge has grown wider, and geographical boundries have been surpassed. The whole world of man has become like one family. Hence we must use our discretion and intelligence and pay due regard to modern ideas in developing our heritage.

## RENAISSANCE MOVEMENT

It is with some reluctance that I have undertaken this survey of the last twentyfive years of contemporary Indian Painting. Nodoubt it is too early for a critical review, yet I feel that there is every likelihood of its being misunderstood unless we sift the art production so that no confusion may arise as to which are the works of artists who are generally following the Indian tradition. There are many heterodox schools following western methods. India has happily a legacy—a tradition of its own, and it is therefore natural that an Indian artist should seek to follow art expression native to the soil of India. This is the reason why we are here trying to give a correct picture of the renaissance of Indian art which has been started in Bengal, within the last three decades instead of trying to embrace all which came through sheer apathy and ignorance of our country's inheritance and tradition.

The Fine arts, according to the educational authorities in India, who got their views from the European Head Masters of the Provincial Art Schools, never existed in our country. It was only a few archaeologists and indologists who had any fair knowledge of the existence of the treasures of ancient Hindu-Buddhist and Moghul art scattered all over the country; but they were quite unsympathetic as to the claim of India in the sphere of the Fine Arts. It is, indeed, surprising that though the Bombay School of Art had a first-hand knowledge of

the art of Ajanta, long before the artists of Bengal knew of the existence of these hidden treasures, yet they were the last to enter into the spirit of these glorious creations of the past. It remained for the sons of Bengal to open and enter the temple-door of their own goddess of art *Kalalaxmi*, when they visited Ajanta as late as 1909, long after the Bombay expedition had been there to copy the famous frescoes. In the Indian Programme Broadcast announcement in the *Radio Times*, London, January 1929, which was introduced by Lord Ronaldshay now Marquis of Zetland the following remarks were made by Mr. Edward Thompson of the Oxford University regarding cultural activities in India. "It so happens that the various items of our programme have been associated chiefly with one part of India—namely, Bengal. That has been partly accidental and partly due to the fact, that the people of Bengal figure so largely in the cultural history of India" (vide *Indian Art and letters*, Vol. 111 No. 1, 1929). Many enthusiasts are to be found in Bombay who are now trying to revive the art traditions of India in their own way, independent of the Renaissance of Indian art started in Bengal, and we are looking forward for their contribution to the revival of Indian Art. Ornamental mannerisms of the ancient mural decorations of Ajanta, however, it combined with the modern realistic representation of natural forms, would, it seems to us form a curious incoherent mixture, more in the nature of a caricature than a serious piece of art. We still hope that the present mixed style will vanish when the neo-Bombay school will realise



the tremendous hypnotic influence of Western art under which they slumbered without having the least understanding of the true spirit of the glorious ancient art of their own country.

With the advent of the renaissance of Indian painting the taste for the realistic representation of natural objects in art amongst the Indian intelligentsia is diminishing and they have now begun to understand the value of the indigenous art tradition which had come to be regarded as crude under the influence of western culture. The Pre renaissance antipathy towards Indian art and culture is no longer possible amongst the people who advocate national culture and national aspiration in general. National consciousness had, indeed, stimulated to a certain extent the love and better understanding of Indian art, though it is not quite in the nature of the purely aesthetic valuation which is essential if the highest standard of art and culture is to be maintained. Though unsympathetic criticism is not yet extinct, it can be safely said that such a rough weather of hostile public opinion which both Messrs Havell and Tagore had to face will never have to be encountered again by any of the future exponents of Indian art. Both the press and the public were furious at their attempts to bring about a Renaissance in Indian art. We feel sad, indeed, to recall those days of controversy, and are ashamed of the colossal ignorance about Indian art which prevailed at that time in our country.

In considering this hostility, we must remember that our tastes have greatly changed since the old days. It is not possible for us to appreciate

fully the descriptions of beauty found in the ancient scriptures and poetical works of India. Our thoughts and tastes have been modified according to the western culture we have imbibed. We should certainly be shocked by the apparition of a certain type of beauty as described by the ancient poet Kalidasa with almond or lotus shaped eyes, and heavy lips. Our fashions are changing daily in almost blind imitation of the changes of fashion in Europe. It is, therefore, essential that we should first have a knowledge of the ideals of beauty prevalent in the olden days so that we may understand the significance of our traditional heritage in art. It would not be wise to think that the artists of Ajanta\* or of the Moghul school lacked in the knowledge of proportion, rhythm and balance which might be evident in the art of Europe. It is interesting to note that some of the famous contemporary artists of Europe are finding inspiration from the East and that the art of Whistler and Van Gogh came to a turning point, when they come in touch with some Japanese and Chinese colour prints. In the contemporary plastic art of Europe we also find evidence of Sino-Japanese influence. It should not be considered a drawback, therefore, that we find a constant exchange of ideas and ideals between the two different continents. The easy access and communication of the modern world cannot be ignored and the growing tendency for mutual understanding through art and culture is inevitable. It is, therefore all the more essential that we should interest ourselves more keenly in the art traditions

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\* See Rupadarsini by M. R. Acharkar (1949)



of our own country. With the closing of the chapter of Moghul history, the history of Indian art remained unhonoured and undiscovered; only the handicrafts of the country was understood. Anglo-Indian misunderstanding continued as late as the time of Birdwood, that there was no indigenous school of fine art worth mentioning in India prior to the Victorian era. Birdwood explained the Fine Arts of India in the following terms: "The spirit of the Fine Arts is indeed everywhere latent in India, but it has yet to be quickened into creative operation. It has slept ever since the Aryan genius of the people exhausted itself in the production of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*" The nineteenth century was the age of the supremacy of the European art, and artists of other nationalities were very keen in competing with Europe; the disaster courted by these was only averted by men like Count Okakura in Japan and Messrs Havell, Coomaraswami and Tagore in India.

It is not possible to write casually about Dr. Abanindra Nath Tagore's work, and the inspiration through which he brought about the regeneration of the art life of the country. The source of art traditions having almost dried up, the ancient art of India was a subject for the specialist to speculate upon; hence at the outset Dr. Tagore had to do a lot of spade work to guide the revivalist school in the right path. His enthusiasm and energy made almost "a dry bone live". Paintings at Ajanta, Bagh, Jogimara and Sigiria etc., remained hidden for centuries and the plastic art of India was, sometimes admired only by the tourists and taken away as mementoes. Artists used to fanfar-



onade with all kinds of artistic technical jargons taught to them by the Head masters recruited from England for the Provincial schools of art run by the Government of India. Artists were keen on perspective — light and shade and anatomy—though they were not-well-versed in these subjects. The names of the artists of Europe, specially of Italy were on everybody's lips. We are not ashamed to admit the fact that we were quite in the dark about the glory of the ancient Indian art and were sharing with others the dream of master artists of Italy like Raphael, Michelangelo and Rosetti.

The art of the then famous artists of India, Raja Ravi Varma was full of anachronism due to his imperfect knowledge of the classical art of the country. Dr. Coomaraswamy in his "National Idealism" explained the quality of his work fully. Reproductions of Raja Ravi Varma's painting adorned the houses of the rich and the lowly alike and in Bengal the cheap reproductions of the Bowbazar Art Studio (Calcutta) were regarded as Bengal's masterpieces. Such was the critical moment when Dr. Tagore came out with the torch of India's true heritage in art and dazzled the eyes of many. He was then only about 30 years of age. This was the opportune moment when Dr. Tagore was invited by the great art educationist Mr. E. B. Havell to join the school of art (Calcutta) as his assistant. Thus when the art education in India needed protagonists these two benefactors came forward to build up the solid foundation of art. This was the day when the history of national art-aspiration began afresh and cultural bondage was removed

long before the political liberation. Dr. A. K. Coomaraswamy also joined these two pioneers and made the art history of modern India possible. Their efforts were, however, not taken at first in the proper spirit. The immense significance of the new movement was not appreciated. It was rumoured by interested parties that the alien Government was trying to impoverise the art education in India by diverting attention to the national art which according to them made a very poor show, and by supressing true art-education which should be based on Western ideals.

These rumours spread like wild-fire. Further mischief was done when faulty reproductions appeared in the Bengali magazine "Probashi" for the half-tone process of printing was in its infancy. That was the reason why much prejudice was caused against Dr. Abanindra Nath Tagore and his instruction, even in the minds of those who were open to conviction. Most people took this neo-art movement, however, as a new craze and either took up a patronising attitude in falstafian fashion or criticized in no measured terms. The Bengali journal "Sahitya" gave in the finishing touch to the unpopularity of the renaissance school by its unsympathetic, almost hostile criticism.

The special class started by Dr. Abanindra Nath Tagore in the school of art, Calcutta (in 1905) was named "Advanced Design Class" and embraced in addition to painting, lacquer-work stained-glass design, wood carving etc. Mr. Havell gave every facility to foster this new section of his school and the students of this class were admitted free and some special scholarships were awarded



to them. Dr. Tagore himself sometimes used his own purse freely to help his pupils. For sometime, at the outset, all these encouragements failed to attract pupils to his class and there was a dearth of students. It was Mr. Gaganendra Nath Tagore, elder brother of Dr. Abanindra Nath Tagore, who popularized the work of the Renaissance school by organizing an Art Society (The Indian Society of Oriental art) in 1907 with Lord Kitchner as its first President. This society was started in Calcutta with little over thirty members. In view of the keen sympathy felt to-day, it is interesting to note the apathy towards our national art which was at first experienced. There were only five Indian members who joined this art movement, the rest were Europeans. The first art exhibition organized in 1908 by the Society at the School of Art premises was, however, an eye-opener; and we find that as a result, more Indian came forward to enlist themselves as members. The first exhibition contained the works of Dr. A. N. Tagore, Mr. G. N. Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Late Surendra Nath Ganguly, Asit Kumar Haldar and Venkatappa. The number of exhibitors increased as the exhibition was repeated annually. The contemporary Indian artists of the Renaissance school chiefly owe their popularity to the Society's activities, and also organisers who established it with earnest endeavour, not the least whom were Dr. A. N. Tagore and his brothers. We cannot but name the following who helped the Art Society in every way they could and without whose support and encouragement the artists of the Renaissance school of painting would not have been able to



pioneer A. K. Coomaraswamy, E. B. Havell, Sir John Woodroffe, N. Blount Scott O'Connor O. C. Ganguly, Percy Brown, Thornton, J. P. Muller were the backbone of the movement. Thus was ordained a national awakening of art and culture and the individual efforts of these men combined in making the work of the society a success.\*

Dr. A. N. Tagore's early life was spent leisurely as is the way with young men in comfortable circumstances. He had, however, unique opportunity of studying music, art and literature for the home of the Tagores, where he lived, was surcharged with the atmosphere. Dr. Rabindra Nath Tagore, his uncle as well as Rabindra Nath's gifted elder brothers were infusing the culture of India with streams of rich new blood. Art requires a congenial atmosphere to thrive in and we find it did luckily find a good home in the Tagore family of Calcutta. Abanindranath took up painting as a hobby and developed it into a serious pastime, but he never wished to make it a business proposition. In his early days none of his relatives knew of his artistic creations. It was the Poet Rabindra Nath alone who first discovered and appreciated his talents and encou-

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\* As long as both Messrs A. N. Tagore and G. N. Tagore could personally watch the progress of the Annual Exhibitions of the Society, no painting which did not contain inner-vision and drawn straight out of imagination was allowed to be hung for display. A slight diversion from original thinking would disqualify an artist; whereas art Exhibitions sponsored at present by the organizations viz: the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society New Delhi, Indian Art Academy, Calcutta and All India Fine Art Societies of Bombay and Madras are deliberately ignoring the characteristic inner-voice of India and disseminating western school of landscapes, portraits and other types of modern art without improving upon taste for original paintings of their own country.

raged him in his artistic enterprise. His early attempts to illustrate his uncles *Chitrangada* show the latent talent in him. Illustrations of his early works could be seen in the old numbers of *Bharati-o-Balak* then edited by Mr. Devijendra Nath Tagore, eldest brother of poet Dr. Rabindra Nath Tagore. During this period amongst his relatives the poet Tagore had two special favourites, one was a nephew, the late Balendra Nath Tagore, a student of literature and the other was Abanindra Nath Tagore, a student of the Fine Arts. Amongst the other painters of the family we may mention here the names of two nephews Messrs Satyaprosad Ganguly, Hitendranath Tagore and the two elder brothers of Dr. Rabindranath, Devijendranath and Jyotindranath. Jyotindra Nath Tagore's pencil portraits were admired by many artists in India and abroad and a book was published by the India Society, London, with Sir William Rothenstin's appreciative preface.

We can recall here an incident in connection with Raja Ravi Varma's visit to Dr. A. N. Tagore's house in Calcutta when the latter was merely a child. The Raja expressed his admiration for some illustrations done by young Tagore from mythological subjects. Just before his death the Raja was also very much impressed by the novelty of style and the delicacy of brush with which Dr. Tagore painted the 'Last Days of Shahjehan.'

It cannot be said with certainty when Dr. A. N. Tagore began painting in Indian style, or what prompted him to do so. In fact he was not conscious that he was instituting a great revolution in art till he came in contact with Mr. E. B. Havell and was



eulogized by Dr. Coomaraswamy at the Delhi Darbar Exhibition organized by the Viceroy, Lord Curzon. He painted a set of illustrations from *Gita Govinda* in the style of Moghul miniatures. These were, however, no more imitations, but new creation and full of individuality and emotional depth. Imitation in any form is a thing unknown to Abanindra Nath and he took great care as a teacher, to see that his pupils were not slaves to his style or mannerisms. He has always tried to develop in his pupils individuality of expression.

Later on Abanindra Nath came into contact with another great art critic of the East, Count Okakura of Japan, who encouraged him not a little, in his uphill work. Okakura's severe criticism of the artists of the Orient who followed Western schools, his insistence that it was the revival of Indian art by Tagore which would in the long run be the goal of Indian Artist, had a most salutary effect and was greatly responsible for the turn of public opinion in favour of Tagore and his school. One must, however, acknowledge that the training in western art which Abanindra Nath had in his youth from distinguished artists of the west could not bind him fast to it. The art of medieval Hindu-Buddhist and Moghul school were studied by him, and he drew his inspiration from all of them without trying to imitate them blindly. He had a vision of a seer which deterred him from basing his art on any particular school of Indian art. He gained first-hand knowledge of Eastern Art, specially that of Persia, Tibet, China, Japan, Java, Siam and Cambodia. Three famous artists of the Far East came to him and stayed with him



for over two years; one of them Mr. Taikwan has now become the foremost modern painter of Japan. At this period a change occurred in Dr. A. N. Tagore's technique and he developed a new expression which was severely criticised by orthodox art critic like Dr. A. K. Coomaraswamy. What he has actually taken from these Japanese artists was their colour-wash technique and gave up tempera work which had a continual legacy in India. Apart from lineal technique and flat colour used in the oriental painting the Japanese developed in particular process to give tone to the various natural phases of winter mist, dusk, haze etc. If he has borrowed the technique from the Far East he has simply got the experiences of an oriental country to enhance prestige and progress of his own art. The mode of expression of each artist varies and we think that it should take its individual shape according to the personal experience and energy of the conception of the individual artist himself.

Moreover, the nucleus of the art movement founded at the School of Art, Calcutta by Messrs. Havell, Coomaraswamy and Tagore in 1905 in no way deliberately wanted a return to ancient styles of Indian painting, but was rather a regeneration and a revivification of the past history and tradition of Indian art. This significant and dynamic appeal of art became so spontaneous that it captured the imagination of artists who have subsequently become famous. Mr. Nandalal Bose, who was going to be a student of engineering, abandoned his studies and against the wish of his parents came and joined the "Advanced Design class" opened by Dr. A. N.

Tagore at the School of Art, Calcutta. Soon after Late Surendra Nath Ganguly and Asit Kumar Haldar followed and gradually other young promising pupils viz., Kshitindra Nath Mazumdar, Venkattappa of Mysore, Shailendra Nath Dey of Allahabad, Samarendra Nath Gupta of Lahore Hakim Mahammad Khan of Lucknow, Sami-uzzama of Lucknow, Saroda Charan ukil of Dacca and Nagahawatta of Ceylon also joined. Except a few, all the others have become well known artists and art educators in their later life.

We shall try to give some account of the work of these artists and their pupils leaving aside those *petit-maitres* and dilattantes who have subsequently filled the horizon of the art world in these days, for it was they, who formed the cohesive force that kept the art movement going. It is wrong to call it a "Bengal School", and can be attributed to a Renaissance movement of Indian art both in its character and technique. [A list of twenty five years of contemporary Indian Painting (1905-1930) and three generations of Dr. A.N. Tagore's disciples is given separately.]

In this way, Dr. Tagore's mode of teaching is not what we generally expect from an ordinary art teacher. His own creative work inspired others to develop taste and confidence. Moreover, he believes in life-long studentship for artists and never tried to impose his personality or any stereotyped form upon his pupils. Besides at their turn he was himself trying to chalk out a path for his expression through his creations so that for a few years it was really a period of parallel development both for himself and his first batch



of disciples. This accounts for the distinct individual style which marks the work of his pupils which showed no traces of blind imitation. Dr. Tagore however, was always ready to lend a helping hand to his pupils and to give full scope to the development of their talents. Thus we find that he took the first opportunity to send his pupils to Ajanta to help Lady Herringham to copy the famous classical frescoes. Messrs. Nandalal Bose and Asit Kumar Haldar were first sent and were later on joined by Messrs. Samarendra Nath Gupta and Venkattappa. They worked in both the winter-expeditions of 1909 and 1910, the account of which may be found in the Lady Herringham's portfolio of the Ajanta paintings published by the India Society, London. The copies of the frescoes are to be found at the Indian section of the South Kensington Museum, London and in the Tagore collection at Calcutta.

Tagore spent quite a fortune on the collection of old paintings and sculptures for the use of his pupils and liberally assisted them in their individual career in every possible manner. We remember, that while we were working under him as students at the School of Art, Calcutta, he spent a great deal of money on equipment for our use in the school, instead of approaching government for sanctioning money. He also tried to keep in touch with all the artists of Indian who were still pursuing the Indian tradition and sometimes brought them over to the school for giving demonstration of their work before his pupils. He even appointed for the benefit of his pupils, who were ignorant of the ancient tradition, a pundit to expound Sanskrit literature. A hereditary



artist of the Patna School, Babu Iswari Prasad was specially appointed in the school of art to teach his pupils the best that he could give. In the same way some Jaipur fresco-painters were brought to teach his pupils the process of their traditional work. Tagore himself painted a fresco after the Jaipur style, called "Kacha and Devajani" which is still preserved in the Calcutta School of Art. We get an account of the technique of Jaipur frescoes in one of Mr. Havell's earliest books on Indian art viz, "Indian Painting and Sculpture". The "Bengal Pat" (folk art of Bengal) and old painted book-covers of the Vaishnava School also attracted his attention. His students were thus surrounded in an atmosphere of Indian art and culture under the congenial and kind guidance of their master. Experiments were carried on in all directions and Bose and Haldar were his ardent followers in the experiment in different types and medium of work. Painting on wood, on silk and wall were carried on under his directions and the activities were generally lively. Tagore never believed in any rigid canon or dogma in art, and his style of work, developed itself through study and experience rather than through conscious endeavour to evolve one. He was a sound practical teacher, never a preacher or a propagandist and one who was temperamentally of a retiring disposition disliking advertisement. His one and only aim was to encourage his pupils to develop their aesthetic sense and imagination and to be faithful to their artistic insight in the pursuit of their career. The whole movement has been summed up in the following lines by Lord Ronaldshay in his book,

"The Heart of Aryavarta". He said, "It is interesting to recall the fact that these two artists (Dr. A. N. Tagore and Mr. G. N. Tagore) now generally recognized as the founders of the modern Bengali school of painting, were at this time ignorant, so they have informed me, of the tradition and formula embodied in the Silpa Shastras, the Indian Classics on Fine art, yet impelled by a curious spiritual *malaise* they embarked upon the work which was so soon to bear fruit. It was, though deep down in the subconscious regions of their being, the instinct of the old Indian masters striving to find expression. The atmosphere amid which they worked may be gathered from a description of them given by an acute observer, as aiming at the development of an indigenous school of imaginative painting stimulated by their own example and by the study of the legends of Sanskrit literature. In the family residence of the Tagore's at Dwarkanath Tagore Lane in Calcutta, they gathered round them a group of artist, many of whom Nandalal Bose, O. C. Ganguly, Kshitindra Nath Mazumdar, Asit Kumar Haldar, Surendra Nath Kar and Mukul Chandra Dey, to mention but a few have since made names for themselves as exponents of the modern schools of Indian painting. The studio where this interesting circle met was described by the same observer as being not so much a school for the encouragement of the indigenous art, as a place for the development of taste, for the cultivation of a sense of beauty, a love of beautiful things, especially such beautiful things as are expressive of the mind of India in its evolution."

Apart from the activities at the Fine arts, Dr.



Tagore's attention was also drawn to the indigenous artistic handicrafts of India. Through the zeal of Abanindra Nath, that of his brother Gaganendra Nath an emporium for cottage industries was established under the name of the 'Bengal Home Industries Association' in Calcutta. In his own drawing room he discarded the usual fashionable Georgian and Victorian furniture, knick-knack and other articles of use. He decorated and furnished it in pure oriental style which he himself designed. His drawing room was then a source of inspiration of other art lovers and we find that Mr. Rathindra Nath Tagore, the son of Poet Dr. Rabindra Nath Tagore, while starting his "Vichitra Club" in his residence, saw that the room was well fitted up in Indian style with objects of artistic interest. In this manner the regeneration in the sphere of "Fine Arts" and "arts and crafts" an aesthetic sense was developed which found expression in the beautifying of even the common household utensils. True lovers of art could not for instance tolerate the sight of an empty kerosine tin being used to keep water for bath and so the love for indigenous handicrafts grew simultaneously. There is an erroneous idea about art which is plastic and art which is graphic. According to this idea, it is not the business of the painter to do anything toward the improvement of the artistic crafts. On the contrary, the great master-artists of Europe like Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci and many other artists designed church lamps chandeliers and architecture which became famous. Dr. A. N. Tagore has similarly stimulated the artisans by his designs of various artistic object viz., jewellery,



furniture, trophy and other utensils etc. He revived the long-forgotten taste for these things and helped the industry to thrive once more in its own soil.

Dr. Tagore held the chair of Indian art at the Calcutta University. His lectures instilled an understanding and appreciation of art and cultivated the aesthetic sense of the intelligentsia which is essential for the cultural growth of India. His articles on Indian art published in various journals in Bengal did much to pave the way towards a sympathetic attitude of indigenous art and craft. His books on 'Bharat-Shilpa' 'Indian Artistic anatomy' "Canons of Indian art" and "Alpona" have become the foremost publications on art for the use of the students of Indian art and are often quoted from by authors writing on the subject. His lucid Bengali literary style with graphic colourful descriptions are admired by the learned literates of Bengal. He has been honoured by the Calcutta University for his Bengali works. His Majesty's Government gave credit to their aesthetic sense and understanding long before recognizing the significance of the political movement in India. It was indeed a very happy omen that they took the renaissance of Indian art in good part and tried to help it to thrive. Dr. Tagore's disciples were given independent charge of the various Schools of Art in India as their Heads and their curriculum thoroughly Indianized. Distinguished authors and artists have visited Tagore from all parts of the world to see his works. The following are but a few of those interested in it Lord. Hardinge of Penhurst, Lord Carmichael, Lord Ronaldshay (now Marquess of

Zetland), Dr. J. H. Cousins, Mr. E. S. Montague, Count Okakura, Sir Michael Sadler, Hisinda, Kampo Arai, Taikwan, Nicholas de Roerich, Kalmikoff, C. S. Hwang, Anna Pavlova, T. F. Lu, Dr. Sylvian Levi, Dr. M. Winternitz, M. Bogdanoff, Sir Willian Rothenstien.

In conclusion we wish to say that if Havell and Coomaraswamy tilled and prepared the field for Indian art, Tagore sowed the seed which has now grown up to be a luxuriant tree.

## THE FUTURE OF INDIAN ART

None can say definitely how the art history of a country gradually builds itself up through the ages. The sweat of the artist's brow brings about changes in the cultural aspects of a nation. The old tradition is superseded by their inventive zeal and a new "school" is again established. The cultural activities began in different forms and through unexpected quarters. Religious reforms and various schemes of social reconstruction are very often carried by individual groupings, sometimes quite isolated from one another. The history of the Renaissance movement in European art shows how in Italy a set of prominent personalities with their profound knowledge of science and aesthetic had changed the general character of the older stereotyped and conventional works of the Gothic or Byzantine art.

The above remarks about the part played by geniuses in the evolution of art-forms should not mislead people into believing that other factors are insignificant. Very often, outbursts of artistic activity follow a wholesale national upheaval. The latter again may assume different shapes. In the middle ages, in Europe as well as in India, it was mainly religious. The influence of the Church, Christian or Buddhist made for anonymity in art and removed of the individual artist. It made the angularities and mannerism the artist sink his oddities in the pool of conformity. The result probably was not all to the good. Later on the



religious interest declined the cultural interests centering in the individual's initiative came in its stead. Thus we find that the great Ajanta period with its nameless artists came to a close. When the Moghuls came, there was a clash of cultures. The old traditions lying sheltered in the courts of Rajputana were rejuvenated by the magic touch of Iran. A procession of artists followed, who were Hindus or Muslims in private life, but showed in their creative work India in the greater richness of life and spirit.

Art movement is like a wave and has its rise and fall. So we find a great upheaval and then a gap where the old traditions almost come to an end. The first enthusiasm for Western culture and thought changed and general outlook in life and art. We began to breathe in Shelley. Keats and Byron, leaving aside our Kalidasa, Bana and Bhasa, admire nude Venuses and reject Nataraja as bizarrerie. Our taste deteriorated and we never knew where we were going.

Then with the 20th century, there, came another change in our thought. The national aspirations in life and culture became articulate. The movement in art started by Late Havell, Coomaraswamy and Dr. A. N. Tagore became a welcome sign for the country. Though originated from quite different impulses, on the one hand from the self-preservative instincts of a nation and out of purely aesthetic curiosity on the other, it remained comparatively free from the partisans of the hour. The future of Indian art depends upon the personalities who will be thrown up by the critical situations of our national life,

An attempt in the meanwhile, is being made by a group of artists in Bombay and Bengal to blend Eastern technique with that of the West. Experiments are the symptoms of life indeed. Yet in as much as life itself is not discontinuous, such experiments, in order to be artistically effective must need take into account the fact of the continuity of the Indian life, viz., the traditions, along with urgency of the changes in our modern social life. In other words, the line of experiments is to be suggested by our vital indigenous art-forms.

The recent attempts made in Bengal, which should never be understood as a provincial "Bengal school of art" but as a reconstruction of Indian art-forms in general, have fortunately captured the heart of the intelligentsia. Many avenues have been opened and experiments are being carried out there already. They are neither mechanical representation of Ajanta nor academical products of aesthetes indulging in abstractions. They embrace all kinds of technique, ancient, mediaeval and modern including cubism, etc. Yet the assimilation is by the Indian tradition and not the other way about.

Of course to those, who lack in imagination and advocate mediocrity will deem Indian art-tradition extremely exacting and tyrannical. There is indeed no scope for running amock and do whatever they can, without taking the trouble of acquiring requisite knowledge in art and its technique. Imagination and intuition played a great part in Indian art, and as such, no mediocre can touch its fring, and can only fill up the horizon

of the art-world with distorted examples of landscapes and portraits of their own creation. To weed them out in the future, would be a job.

The country which has got its own tradition to boast about, can seldom go out of track for any indefinite period and is sure to come back to its right path. Those who believe in tradition will always act as a brake upon the people, who wish to go beyond it,



## THE SUBJECT MATTER OF ART

Consequent on the revival of Indian art there has arisen a question with regard to the subject-matter of the latter; namely whether the artist should resort for his inspiration and ideas to mythology or paint scenes from modern life. The answer is, perhaps, self-evident: the artist may do either or both. He may pick up his stones from any quarry he likes. None can circumscribe the sphere of his selection. Though the truth of this statement is obvious, yet not seldom it is lost sight of in argumentation, on or estimates of, art, with the result that opinion is divided on the question of ecclesiasticism of the artist.

But it is often argued—and to us it seems, fallaciously—that selecting and executing an idea or a “story” from mythology or choosing a traditional theme, is imitation and that it does not lead to an original creation. This view is not right. It is the artist's peculiar and personal perception of the mystery or the being and the beauty of things which determines the quality or excellence of a picture. And in as much as that the artist gives expression to an aspect of truth, or beauty of the object he draws or paints, which has not been perceived before or expressed into beautiful form, he is original, no matter whatever be the source of his inspiration or the ‘text’ of his painting. It is only excellence in conception, and their execution paintings survive the everchanging taste of people.

Let us illustrate our point: before Raphael painted his immortal Madonnas, there were several artists who had executed the same subject, but it is Raphael's work which is prized and remembered to this day, while that of others is nearly forgotten.\* Again, thousands of images of the Buddha were carved in stone or wood and the relics thereof are scattered all over India, but it is Buddha's images discovered in Saranath, Ceylon and Java which have a place of honour in our art gallery. Nor was there any question of imitation here, because this particular subject had been treated to the point of the thread-bare. The artist is always striving towards perfection, and so long as an artist can give a new turn to ideas and objects, which have existed or have been worked upon in the past or still exist, he will be reckoned as a true interpreter of his art.

It will not be out of place here to quote Mr. Dwijendranath Tagore's views on what is not imitation. "Suppose", says he, "there are two artists one of them has painted an object; the other sees it and being inspired by a new idea, expresses it in line and colour and it turns out to be identical with the first picture. Now, shall we say that the second artist copied from the picture of the first? Not at all, because both were inspired by individual emotions raised by the object concerned. And we may add that, if an artist sees a thing and after sometime paints it with the result that his production is a likeness of the object observed, he cannot be charged with imitation. There will be

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\* A critical appreciation of Italian Primitives has been a characteristic feature of recent connoisseurship in Europe and America.



as much difference between the two as there is between a photograph and a painting.

Moreover, mythology will always appeal to the artist being full of inspiring ideas. The history of art in other countries as well as in our own bears ample testimony to this fact. In Greece, Egypt and India scores of artists had derived their inspiration from the mythologies of their respective races and countries. A glance at the past records of art reveals also another fact; namely, that the artist chose for his subject-matter lives of heroes, kings and religious teachers in order to perpetuate the ideals they embodied. For instance, in Italy there are many paintings which illustrate on the canvas the life and teaching of Christ. There is, in a word, something like hero-worship in art. And in a country like India, where certain associations and symbols, like Krishna's call of the flute—(call of Infinity) the eternal love of Bharata for Rama, Sita's fidelity to her husband and the symbolic representation of the world by a lotus are ingrained in the culture of the people, it is difficult for the artist to cut himself off from mythology. Painting a bald or bare fact is quite different from painting the artist's sense of the same fact. The daily life of a common labourer may be faithfully depicted by an artist, but it will not appeal to the average man unless it is informed with the painter's perception of the spirit of the scene; the beauty in the brawns of the workman, the rhythm of his action, the harmony between nature and the labourer, all these will exercise and appeal to the imagination of the true artist. But the tendency nowadays is towards freedom in ideas and expres-



sion. It is because the art of a country changes with the variation in the outlook of the people on life and nature. There was a time when deities appealed to and evoked the admiration of the average man and understood as multifarious expressions given by a man to the unknowable infinity. We seem to have outgrown that now and even a great man like Raja Ram Mohan Roy misconstrued image worship as superstitions. In this way, we go to modern life with all its expansions and achievements. And as regards freedom in expression it is true that the artist cannot have his own way in it and that he is bound by certain principles of working, which are revealed to him by his intuition. Technique plays an important part in the production of a painting and there are no hard and fast rules governing it. But what is required is this: that the mental impression must be as beautifully expressed as the idea and that colour and line are employed with the sole purpose of developing the sense of the sight and conveying to the onlooker what the artist meant to say.

Paintings may be divided into two classes according to their subject-matters. Epic and Lyric or Classic and Romantic. Of course, the division is not exclusive; one may overlap the other. All that depends on the fact whether the critic lays more stress on the idea than on the treatment of it, which may be quite new and original. This is by way of a digression.

The mission of the artist is noble indeed. It is he who has initiated his fellow creatures into the perception, admiration and enjoyment of the ultimate beauty in God's creation. He has spread

"in the widest commonality" the joy which is born of the understanding of the work of the Divine artist. And to the artist the world is never old, it is to him a perennial spring of inspiration.

## RABINDRANATH TAGORE—THE PAINTER

In 1932, I had the opportunity of seeing the Poet Dr. Rabindra Nath Tagore's paintings for the first time. He started such art work at his advanced age of seventy\*. The beauty and vision which the spontaneity of the poet's pen creates, is repeated in another sphere when he takes up brush, but one is the result of his life long *sadhana* (achievements) and the other is the natural overflow of a teeming fancy. Here in the place of *sadhana* we have concentrated *ananda*. If we wish to find in these paintings the lines and colours which from the secret depths of the poet's mind acquire such wonderful play in his poetry we shall be disappointed. But if we should seek the fountain from which his poetry springs and finds sustenance, then we shall see that these strange lines and colours have the same source and are only a different manifestation. Master-artists all the world over in their search for beauty show this natural spontaneity and simplicity.

All who know the poet are aware of the fact that early in life he showed signs of appreciation of fine art. If amongst the younger members of his family he noticed artistic talent he did all in his powers to encourage it and to see that no obstacles prevented them from cultivating it. Through his immortal songs and poetry too he would inspire them. The author owes a great deal of

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\* Tintoretto at 74 painted the vast canvas 74 feet by 30 and Titian at 98 painted his historic picture of the "Battle of Lepanto."



encouragement to him and it was he who introduced me to the early paintings of my *gurudeva* Dr. Abanindra Nath Tagore, the father of the renaissance school of Indian art. Countless numbers of Indian artists owe their inspiration to him, and those who have not come into personal contact with him were greatly inspired by his songs and poems, for these have opened to them the gateway of imagination.

The poet is indeed a mighty teacher of graphic art, for though in his paintings we find more suggestiveness than actual accomplishment yet the pages of his poetry (we mean manuscripts) are strewn with the most delicate and exquisite pictorial gems of decorative nature which will be a store-house of inspiration for artists for ages to come. His paintings have not that perfection and finished harmony of form, and colour which is the essence of all art, but they have in them a wonderful quality of craftsmanship, a creative urge, which is something quite spontaneous and whose charm is indescribable. We do not think that we can ever give an uniform and final judgment on a piece of art. Whether we like a painting or not depends on one's taste and cultural background. Those for instance, who care for the coarse commonplace characterisation of the Parsee Theatre of Calcutta of the nineteenth century, can understand nothing more delicate and subtle performances of Tagore. Again those who are admirers of Rabindra Nath's plays like "*Post Office*" and "*Cycle of Spring*" draw their joy from the subtle forms of art. Thus, it is while some people will term a piece of art fantastic, others will give it the

highest praise.

To day, however, we can see a new valuation of art work. From the impatience with traditional forms which is so evident in Modern European art, and which has even invaded our art by creating a contempt for old techniques, we can surmise that in art at least we can no longer be satisfied by following the beaten track. We must express our own country's heritage and own individuality in many forms. It was Abanindra Nath Tagore who first taught us this; and that, it is his paintings which demonstrate the gospel of individuality in art most perfectly. Like a simple child dazzled by a painted toy we had stretched out our hand to take from the foreigner his gift of art. How disastrous this would have been we need not say to-day, for the danger is past and a strong indigenous school of art has been established in India, which with its foundation firmly fixed in the traditions of Indian art, is yet open to modern influences, as testified by Gogonendra Nath Tagore who has successfully introduced the cubist and Futurist styles into Indian art. These experiments are interesting (though not very lasting) in as much as they inspire the Indian genius to try new forms while maintaining his own individuality, so that Indian art may not stagnate. Again the reversion to Primitive or child's art, which is one of the latest tendencies of modern European art is now being introduced to us in the paintings of the poet, though the poet's works have a child-like spontaneity and have not the laboured effort to imitate the simple forms and characteristic of the sur-realist primitive



school of painting of modern Europe.

This movement, this apparently destructive tendency, however distasteful to conservative artists wedded to traditional forms, is no doubt a great boon to us, for it does not allow art to stagnate and as such is desired by those who value progress. Just as terrible cyclones appear at intervals and turn everything upside-down, in their destructive force clearing away a great deal of the overflow of nature, so in art periodically there appear certain revolutionary artists who by crushing and entirely destroying old forms and ideals give rise to a new Era in art. In Europe Cezanne, Van Gogh, Epsrtein, Picasso, Paul Klee, Juan Gris, Kubin etc and similar artists may be cited as examples of these revolutionary tendencies. In time, however, these artists will form their own schools giving rise to a new tradition in art. In this respect we remember that when in 1909 the author wrote an article on Ajanta in *Bharati* magazine in colloquial Bengali, critics were severe in their condemnation of my style, but to-day this style has become the ordinary vehicle of literary expression in Bengal.

The world to-day is full of revolutionary tendencies due to wars and conflicts between different countries. Old ideals and forms are breaking up. In politics and social structure the establishment of communism in Russia and China is profoundly changing older valuations. The changes which are taking place plainly show that it will no longer be possible to tread the way chalked out by our ancestors. Conservative's caution must yield to the call of the new. So it will not be very difficult for us to appreciate these perhaps too modern



productions of painting which the poet Tagore has painted for us.

Joy in the act of creation without fear or prompted by any other motive force is indeed the taste of the true artist; but it often happens that an artist will follow fashion rather than the inner urge, in order to gain a cheap popularity. These latter sell their art work like grocers in the world's market and do not deserve the title of artists. It is, however, this unalloyed joy of the artist in creation, irrespective of and over-flowing the boundaries of any particular medium, that we see in this attempt of the poet of seventy taking up the brush for the first time. In former days when correcting up his poetry instead of putting his pen through a word he would in abstraction of mind carry on scratching out till the lines took the form of some fantastic figure or object. That his paintings too are born in the same spontaneous manner without previous thought or premeditation can easily be seen. His strong sense for rhythm has this time expressed itself through his paintings. We can see the rhythmic and sensitive urge that carries him along and is so clearly evident in the beauty of the lines which give form to his fancy.

Who has not seen the fantastic play which goes on in nature? Standing outlined against the evening sky-line in the shapes of darkness the trees are transformed into strange fantastic figures. One of them looks like a tall-one-legged man with a peaked nose and long flowing beard. Another looks like some unknown bird with a big comb on its head. In like manner the clouds shape themselves into some mysterious land, with hills of

massed gold and streams of glittering diamonds beckoning to us in their transitory glory.

All worshippers at the alter of beauty feel the charm of these ephemeral and fanciful form of nature, but it is Rabindranath who in his old age, with the enthusiasm of youth, finds for us in his painting key to this mystery of nature.

In old English Literature there came an age when freeing themselves from the bondage of Latin, English authors took their stand on colloquial English and created a new literature. So in the age of the renovation of art-life a movement for destruction and recreation is on foot. In India too it is no longer possible to enclose literature within the pale of Sanskrit and Sanskritised vocabularies. In the sphere of language it was the poet who first freed Bengal from the puritanical shackles of Sanskrit forms. Now in the realm of art, too, the poet Tagore is giving a helping hand to the future generations of artists a new field of action.

It seems to be the special privilege of Rabindra Nath Tagore to be able to enter into the hearts of children. From his paintings we can see that he has eschewed the necessity of learning and giving himself entirely to the joy of the child in drawing whatever his fancy dictated; the poet has created a unique style of art, inspired by a German artist Kubin, the appreciation of which requires a child's heart and capacity for enjoyment. Though the young German artist Kubin has left a great mark in Tagore's painting, his paintings are not quite the same as what is called timeless primitive art in Europe. They are like Kubin's

paintings, rather the expression of the fantastic imaginings of childhood. A sophisticated attempt to go back to the primitive differs from the attempt of the poet who without knowing the technique of line and colour, creates for us some strange unknown world which may well compare with the reproductions of primitive man trying to give forms to fancies. The paintings puzzle us like some mysterious figures, yet they do not express any deep philosophical meaning, nor do they lead us to a definite new art technique. Herein lies their distinction and so we shall end by quoting Coomaraswamy. "The poet's art is childlike but not childish". In this one sentence he sums up all that has to be said of the poet Rabindra Nath Tagore's paintings.



## JOGIMARA CAVE PAINTINGS.

In the month of February 1914, my friend Mr. Samarendra Nath Gupta of the Lahore Mayo School of Art and myself were summoned by the Archaeological Survey Department to join an expedition to the Ramgarh Hills, situated in the Feudatory State of Sirguja in the Central Provinces. We were commissioned to copy out the ancient fresco-paintings on the ceilings of Jogimara caves supposed to be of 300 B. C. We arrived in due course at Pendra Road station on the B. N. Railway. This is also the station where pilgrims detrain for the sacred shrine of Amarnath and for the source of the Narvada.

We joined Mr. I. T. Blakiston, the then Assistant Superintendent of the Archaeological Department (subsequently retired as the Director General of Archaeology) at the railway station and after a day's rest commenced the journey on an elephant. We had two elephants to ride and 60 men to carry our tents and other equipments. The first day of the journey was really very pleasant; but the prospect of a long six days, uncomfortable ride on the back of an elephant had a rather chilling effect on our minds. The scorching heat of the sun and the want of proper diet caused no little discomfort and inconvenience and towards the end of our tedious journey we were heartily sick of the whole business. The Ramgarh hills stand about 100 miles off from the Pendra Road Railway station.

The height of the main peak of the Ramgarh hills is about 2000 feet above sea level. It is crested with an old ruined temple which serves to remind travellers of the glory of days that are past. We caught a distant glimpse of it as we passed along. We had to cross a plain and then to go partly through the forest on our elephant and thereafter to trudge along up hill for some distance on foot. At last we reached on elevated tableland which we had to cross in order to get to the top of the peak. We saw on the tableland a spring which runs down a steep incline and forms the source of a river. Tradition has it that in the past age, Sita, Rama and Lakshman once bathed at this very pool during the period of their banishment from Ajodhya. Hindu pilgrims regard this spring as even more sacred than the Ganges itself.

On our way we found a ruined gate with its facade containing ornamental work considerably mutilated. Then we came accross some Sati stones lying about, the condition of these stones being no better than that of the gate. We passed by a stone which resembles a high alter with a flight of steps carved out of the stone. One can hardly make out of the use of so big a stone alter in such a place. As we climbed higher up we passed a small temple chiselled out of a single piece of stone. It stands as a finger-post to guide pilgrims to the main shrine. Soon after we found one huge block of black stone with a small grotto carved out of it. The grotto is provided with a very narrow door which is accessible only to little children.



We now encountered the most difficult portion of the hill we had to climb. We found a steep, narrow track leading up to the temple situated at the crest of the hill. We had sometimes to crawl on all fours for long distance at a stretch and so we at last got quite tired. Our joy knew no bounds when the remains of a beautifully curved gateways on stone caught our view. We soon reached a balcony-like place from which we had a panoramic and bird's-eye view of the distant scattered hills and of the lakes and plains below. It was a fascinating landscape. The green plains below looked beautiful beyond description. The hills encircling the distant horizon looked like the great blue lotus petals of Vishnu. We gazed for a time in silent wonder at the view spread out before us. On either side of the gateway there are verandahs supported by rows of pillars and in one of them there sat a figure with folded hands with serpents coils round them. The piece of sculpture displays a remarkable degree of accuracy in anatomical proportions. There was also a pretty ornamental lotus carved out in the arch over the entrance. We left these behind and rose higher up the hill. We soon reached the crest consisting of a piece of level ground which was 2000 feet above the plains below. There also was a ruine of another stone gateways in a worse state of preservation. Some carved stone figures lay scattered about the place. What with rain and the wear and tear of ages very little is left of their original perfection, but there was enough in these remains to give us a faint idea of their former glory. The temple is called Ramgarh temple. The style



seemed to us to resemble that of Bhubaneswar. It has been observed that the older the sculpture the less prominent would be the relief. Judged by this test the temple must be very ancient. Another proof of its age is that the arched ceiling was not built with any mortar but it was simply built up with stones placed one upon another. In ancient times mortar was not used in the construction of arches in the buildings. A few images of deities are placed inside the temple. There are Rama, Lakshmana and Sita represented in one block of stone, which seemed to be of the 12th century work. There is a Yogini holding a sacred vessel of water, besides a figure of Vishnu and another single figure of Rama. These images are thought to be a later date. There was Sivalinga in the courtyard and a bronze bell suspended from a tree. It is needless to mention that these have been recently introduced by the local village priests.

We had to make a short descent from the top in order to see the Jogimara cave. The cave 'Jogimara' contained the ancient fresco-paintings which formed the main object of our visit. We had to cross a natural tunnel about 180 feet in length to go to the cave. According to Dr. Bloch this tunnel was called Hatipole i. e., a hole bored by elephants. The tunnel was so wide and dark that it might be taken to be the open mouth of a gigantic dragon ready to devour its prey. There, right away in a corner, the water from a spring was constantly dripping on a stone in which a cup-like hollow had been caused by the action of the water. The gentle dripping sound

of the spring resound between the caves and the hills produce a loud noise. We drank from the natural stone basin and found the water cool and refreshing. The spring was marked out by a chiselled line which seems to be the handiwork of the old cave-dwellers.

We had then to rise still higher up again to some extent after passing through the tunnel and then we came to the two caves of Jogimara and Sitabangra. We passed by another cave before we reached them but calls for no remarks, as it is only a crude type of an old cave-dwelling. Dr. Bloch described a cave called Sitabengra. 'Bengra' according to the local dialect is 'bunglow'. The Sitabengra seemed at first sight to be a natural cave; but when we entered it we were differently impressed. We found it had been carefully carved out to suit its ancient occupants. According to Dr. Bloch and others, it was the only recognised specimen of an early amphitheatre after the Greek model left by the ancient Indians. There are four holes at the facade which are supposed by them to show the place for suspending the drop-scene by means of wooden poles. The semi-circular staircase leading to the upper entrance to the cave was supposed by them to have been the gallery used by spectators. But the rows of the stairs are so arranged that it was impossible for one to have a view of the interior of the cave or to be able to see any performance; and the position would be such as to place the spectators with their back to the stage. There was moreover little space left in front outside the cave to accommodate a temporary wooden stage which might have been built at



that time. The very steepness of the place rendered it unfit for a stage. It did not strike us as probable that this place was ever used as a stage.

Of course, Dr. Bloch does not mention any wooden stage nor we find any indication of any such stage, but some people suppose that it existed. All that we could make out was that this cave was used by the cave-dwellers as a hall for musical entertainments. We think that the four holes at the outer entrance were used for suspending a screen to keep off wind and rain. The average height of the ceiling from the floor was only six feet. The ceiling was too close to our heads when we stood inside it. In the interior, there is a raised platform running right round the cave. There is a wide drain in this cave passing through the wall. We noticed some carefully-made holes in the floor but we could not make out what these were meant for. Just at the back of the same hill opposite the Sitabengra cave, there are the Lachmanbengra and certain other small caves. In these caves also we found traces of human habitation. These caves contain many raised stone seats and stone beds. In the Lachman bengra cave also there is a drain. The story goes that during Rama's exile while Lakshmana was observing a fast Sita in order to quench his thirst used to pour out some honey and fruit juice from her Bengra (cave) along this drain. There is a broken image of Rama and one representing Lakshmana in full armour placed inside the cave. Outside, on the right wall looking towards the cave, there is a strange impression of a foot print with the portrait of a warrior chiselled on it.



We could not make out what it actually indicated, but it looked very much like the impression of a man's foot on clay purposely carved out on the stone wall. The people here regard it as an impression of the scarlet foot of the great Rama.

After observing these antiquities we proceeded to the cave Jogimara to see the fresco-paintings there. This cave is a natural one. It measured only ten feet by six. The paintings are drawn on the ceiling in panels which are divided from one another by red lines. The ceiling is much, too low so that we could touch the pictures with our hands. The light is sufficient as the front door is wide open. There is also a hole right up to the top of the cave through which light is admitted.

At the very sight of the Jogimara cave the paintings seemed to be of an inferior type and quite as crude as the lowest type of the 'pat' paintings of Bengal. While engaged in copying these paintings we came across some clever lines of earlier drawings which had been evidently covered up by the later paintings. Thus we found that the cave very probably possessed drawings of a superior class at some unknown period in the past. In latter times (undoubtedly for remote from the present day) some people appear to have covered up the former paintings with a thick coating of white colouring-matter and left behind these clumsy daubs of their own.

The first part of the panel from the right side of the cave shows a few human figures, a figure of an elephant and a grotesque looking shark which is shown by means of a few decorative

dark lines indicating waves, to be floating in the river. The paintings are painted with white, red and black pigments only. In the second part, there are several figures seated underneath a tree. We could not make out what the subject of the painting really was. The trees are indicated by a thick trunk, a few branches, with only two or three leaves. The leaves and the trees are all entirely drawn in red. There is a garden drawn in black lines against a white background in this panel. The garden is represented only by some lilies painted in black lines. A dancing couple is painted over one of these flowers entirely in red. We could not find either the eyes or the noses of the dancers intact. The flowers are not shown in colour. The subject matter of the fourth panel is extremely curious. This panel contains a few lilliputian doll-like figures entirely without proportions and absolutely wanting in expression. These paintings are outlined in black. The pose of the figures is rather amusing. In one place there is only a bird's beak served the ravage of time above a human figure. There is no means of knowing what this is intended to represent. The mystry is likely to remain for ever unsolved. The fifth panel represents a lady squatting on the ground while some musicians are engaged in a dancing revelry. The lines of latter bear a striking resemblance to those of an inferior Ajanta painting. The picture, though not so well executed as the caves at Ajanta, appears to be identical in design. However that may be, this was the only painting



which really interested us. In the six and seven panels, the paintings are well-nigh undecipherable. Closer inspection would however reveal several paintings resembling those of the Chaitya temples and some of them are representations of ancient Indian chariots. Old Indian chariots bear a marked resemblance to old Greek chariots. The fresco-ground here is not at all like that of Ajanta. At Ajanta, the ground for the frescoes was prepared with a thick coating of earth and other materials but here the ground appears to be made of white paints laid over the rough surface of the ceiling. Only three colours red, yellow and black are used for painting, whereas those used at Ajanta are numerous. The ground was prepared with white clay. It is sufficiently clear that the Ramgarh artists were not so well-skilled as their congeners of Ajanta either in the art of painting or in draftsmanship. But it must be safely said that the relics inspected by us bear testimony to their spirit of enterprise and boldness in execution.

There are several other caves besides those already mentioned. Some were evidently chiselled out for dwelling purposes while others appeared to be natural grottos. Some were altogether inaccessible. There is a natural cave which is shaped much like a human eye. The Ramgarh caves are quite different in character from the finely carved Buddhist caves.

There are inscriptions deeply engraved on the stone walls of the Jogimara and Sitabengra caves. They record a love affair between a dancing girl and a sculptor. Dr. Bloch and others



have attempted to prove that the characters are older even than those of Asoka's time. Dr. Bloch has narrated his travels and discoveries in the Journal of the Asiatic Society. He formed the opinion that the Sitabengra was an amphitheatre after the ancient Greek style as he found the name of a dancing girl in the inscription there. It is much to be regretted that Dr. Bloch has not dealt with the Ramgarh temple in detail. We think that there must have been some connection between the cave-dwellers and the temple whatever the precise nature of that connection might have been. There was in ancient times a custom to maintain well-trained dancing girls to perform the sacred dance before the deities in the temples during the hours of worship. Thus we still find Devadasis were employed in the south Indian temples. All that can be safely said is that there was a Devadasi attached to this temple. The sacred place of Ramgiri as mentioned by Kalidas in his cloud messenger (Meghdoota) where Yaksha was banished may be this Ramgarh. A pleasant view of a fleecy cloud over-hanging two peaks reminded us the following lines:

अद्रेः शृङ्ग हरित पवनः किंविदितुन्मुखी भिर  
हृष्टोन् साहस्रकितचकितं मुग्धसिद्धाङ्गनाभिः ।  
स्थानादस्मात् सरसनिचुलादुत्पतोदङ् मुखः खं,  
दिङ् नागानां पथि परिहरन् स्थूलहस्तावलेपान् ॥

"The sight thee will drive to plain surprise.  
The Siddha wives: in wonder face upturned.  
They will ask, if winds are tearing off the peak :  
As leavest thou this Asram, cool and wet.  
With Nichula woods, do thou avoid

The moving Ding-naga's trunks, and shoot up high"\*

The real mystry of these cave temples must be left to be unveiled by some future antiquary.

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\* From the "Cloud Messenger" translated by S. C. Sarcar, M. A. (Bengal, Provincial Civil Service).

## CAVE-PAINTINGS OF AJANTA

Ajanta frescoes are repository of indigenous art of India. Such a high standard achieved by these paintings cannot be an accident, and must have developed in the bygone days of pre-Buddhist time. There are references regarding fresco-paintings in earlier Sanskrit and Prakrit literature, especially in the Valmiki's "Ramayana" which approximately dated 2000 B. C. According to ancient Indian literature, sculptural reliefs and paintings were termed as "*Chitra*" (picture) and as such, there was actually no marked demarcation between them at that time. Bas-reliefs were akin to paintings and were primarily linear works. Paintings were apparently treated in the same spirit and drawn mainly with lines and colours. Indian painting in this way was never realistic in its strict sense of the term. An artist always endeavoured to describe episodes of his choice on canvas out of his imagination or memory. It can be called a synthesis of subject and its appeal. The ideology of the East and especially that of India has been well defined recently by Christmas Humphreys in a book on "Buddhism". He says, "Generally speaking Eastern art is more subjective, symbolic, abstract and impersonal. Western art is more objective, representative, concrete, and personal. Buddhism teaches that things are created by the mind rather than that the mind perceives existing things. It is therefore concerned with interpreting values rather than describing facts. It is never reali-



stic or naturalistic in the Western sense. The sculptor or painter is describing a memory picture, a compound of thought and feeling based on past experience. To achieve this inner vision he strives, if need be with the aid of religious exercises, to become the object which he wishes to portray. He attempts to attune his mind to the Infinite, and to express the result.....The knower becomes the object of his knowledge, the artist the thing he visions or coceives, and if he possesses the proper means of exteriorization, he will transmit in symbols or shapes or signs something which contains a spark of that eternal stream of life or consciousness which abides when forms decay."

The inner significance of Indian art described above can be duly realized when we actually stand before the fresco-paintings of Bagh and Ajanta. Sir John Marshall has truly said, "The school which these paintings represent was the fountain-head from which half the art of Asia drew its inspiration, and none can study their rhythmic composition, their instinctive beauty of line, the majestic grace of their figures, and the boundless wealth of their decorative imagery without realizing what a far-reaching influence they exerted on the art, not of India alone and her colonies, but of every other country into which the religion of the Buddha penetrated."

Many scholars and observers find trend of foreign elements in Ajanta paintings. There are Persian figures and "cube" forms of background landscapes in the paintings regarded as of Iranian origin. Undoubtedly there was a direct communication between the nations of the world

through the trade routes both by land and seas. About this Havell says, "To form a just estimate of any national art we must consider, not what that art has borrowed, but what it has given to the world. Viewed in this light Indian art must be placed among the greatest of the schools, either in Europe or in Asia. None of the great art schools are entirely indigenous and self-contained in the archaeological sense; there are none which did not borrow materials from other countries, and the schools of Greece and Italy are no exceptions to this rule. India was a borrower like Greece and Italy, but what she borrowed from Persia, so to speak, a draft on her own bank, a part of the common stock of Aryan culture." The genius of India absorbed continuously such foreign examples without hampering its own developments. She left her permanent impression all over Asiatic countries wherever Buddhist art penetrated along with the Dharma. The tide of Buddhist art flowed in Khotan, Miran and Tarfan and also profoundly affected the art and culture of China and Japan. The frescoes of the Thousand Buddha of Honon and Horiyuji and Kambhoji of Japan are of linear technique flowing free like that of Ajanta.

Ajanta frescoes stand in comparison with the Italian renaissance paintings though the former is very much older than the latter in age. The lineal technique of Ajanta can only be compared with that of Gothic or Byzantine paintings. Only the Byzantine paintings are more conventional and rigid than Ajanta paintings. Men and women of Ajanta are bedecked with jewellerys whereas draperies have replaced its grandeur in Italian



frescoes. Regarding romantic expressions and interpretation of life I quote Lady C. J. Herringham who along with the present writer and his colleagues made Ajanta popular in our times. She says, "Apart from the intrinsic interest of the frescoes, it must be remembered that they occupy nearly an unique place in the history of art..... very careful study and rendering of racial, cast, type and colour is a marked characteristic of Ajanta art. We may turn to Brhamin romances and plays of the same period such as 'Kadambari' and 'Shakuntala' and find there similar types described in words. The high-born and low-born with their dresses and ornaments are made to live before our eyes in the frescoes their pleasures, battles, darbars and processions, the palace chambers, lotus tanks and the best known animals and birds. "Most of the paintings are from Jatakas-the legends of the early life of the Buddha in various successive stages. This accounts for the rich complexity of life depicted in these frescoes. The Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism of China and Hindu-Buddhist philosophy of India created a peculiar spirit of compassion and peace in life which reflected ultimately in art of the Asiatic countries. The obvious conventional intricate character of technique kept up this peculiar distinctive trait unhampered throughout Asia. Though the Ajanta technique developed much earlier than the Italian Renaissance the eternal quest for hermony through rhythm and grace never lacked or hampered the progress of art in India. With the result, we find a continuity in art upto the beginning of the Victorian Era. Same spirit of compassion and peace remained unchanged



even in the folk-art of this country. On the contrary, after the Gothic and Byzantine art of Europe, a great change occurred in art and its ideology. Art developed under the shadow of science which rapidly grew in Europe and scientific analysis of art by the art-critics brought a great change in its outlook. Photography has liberated painting and the psychological science is now attempting to suit its pocket. Art of Europe has become a handmaiden of science and aim and object has been very much subordinated and reduced. The harmony (expression and *Rasa*) that we expect in art is totally lacking in the so-called Modernist school of painting of Europe. The quietistic "Sattva Guna" the life's eternal bliss can be perceived in Oriental art and also in the Byzantine school of Paintings in Europe.

I now wish to state the history of Ajanta. The rock-cut temples of Ajanta are situated in East Khandesh of Hyderabad State in the Indhayadri range and were built sometimes between the first century to the ninth century. The plastic skill of the carvers of these caves reached its zenith and the magnificent Chaityas (cathedrals) and Viharas (monasteries) were the result. Ajanta was discovered by a company of British troops quite accidentally and was first described in 1829 in a Royal Asiatic Society's journal. Copies of frescoes were first made in 1844 by Major Gill and perished by fire at the Crystal Palace Exhibition in 1872. In 1875 Mr. Griffiths, the then Principal of the Bombay School of Art began the work along with his students up to 1885. A monumental publication by the Government of India in 1896 was its result. After a long

interval Lady Herringham, Miss. Larcher and Miss. Luke came from England and worked along with the author, Nandalal Bose, Venkatappa and S. N. Gupta in the winters of 1909-10 and again in 1910-11. The India Society, London, subsequently published a monograph in 1915.

There are twenty-nine caves in Ajanta out of which Nos. 1, 2, 9, 10, 16 and 19 still contain large amounts of frescoes. Among the most important frescoes, mentioned may be made of "Mother and Child before Buddha" illustrating Buddha's son Rahula and her mother offering alms to Buddha, "The Battle of Ceylon," "Temptation of Buddha," 'Bodhisattva' and 'Padmapani', are works of art of great worth for their *ensemble* of the grandiose composition. Ajanta paintings received great homage from scholars, poets, and critics of the world and inspired confidence for indigenous art of India to develop spontaneously.

Jahanara Begum, daughter of Shajehan wrote about Ajanta in her memoir as follow; "I saw the painting school, the big room full of disciples brought together by Akbar from every corner of Hind; and also came hither from other countries for the fame of this new Ghazni had spread wide. The disciples throng round the two masters from Tabriz, and Persian painters have not only brought with them paintings from their native country, from Herat and Shiraz, but also from the great days of Bagdad under the caliphs, and from the ancient Chinese Empire. Visions of vanished worlds of glory throw their spell over these young minds, and with the juice of the flowers of Hind they try to create fantasies in colour no less beau-

tiful than those they have seen. And lo! the manuscripts illuminated by the young painters are soon worthy to rank even with the old master-pieces in the library of the Timurids. But the *Hindus painted best of all*, as if they were still sitting in the cave-monastery of *Ajanta*, using their brushes to conjure up the life of the outside world upon its walls." (Vide: *The Life of a Moghul Princess, Jhanara Begum* by Andrea Butenschion, 1931).



## THE PAINTINGS OF THE BAGH CAVES

Mural painting adorns its sister art architecture and it can be judged by its design and its structural unity with its architectural environments. To understand Indian fresco it must be seen in the space which it occupies, but the frescoe paintings of the Italian Renaissance can be quite as well understood when taken out of its architectural surroundings.

It has been ascertained that it was only at Pompeii that the art of painting had attained a high degree of perfection contemporaneously with those of Ajanta and Bagh. But the technique of those paintings has nothing in common with that of India. The paintings of Pompeii are defective in perspective. "In the Pompeian landscape piece of "Paris on Mount Ida" there is no sense of the relative proportions of objects, and a cow in the foreground is much smaller than Paris, who is a long way back in the composition. There is a good deal of resemblance between the paintings of India with those of China and Japan due to the Buddhist art spread to those countries along with Buddhist religion.

The mural paintings in the temple of Horiuji in Japan (708—715. A.D.) are quite Indian in character, recalling the frescoes of the cave-temples of Ajanta in their grand, strongly outlined figures and in the feeling for character and life which they revel (vide Painting in the Far

Fast—Bynion 2nd. Ed., p. 98). Besides those of Japan and Chinese paintings of the old Buddhist Mahayana period have been discovered on the mud walls of houses in Central Asia and Turkistan; as these paintings lay buried in the sands of the desert they have not suffered much damage. Some say that Mahayana Buddhism was introduced four hundred years after the birth of Buddha by Nagarjuna of Berar, Mahayana Buddhism assumed the aspect of Hinduism as it got mixed up with Tantric rites. This accounts for the fact that in Khotan, Meeran, Turfan, and other places in Central Asia, (Chinese Turkistan) figures of Ganapati and other Hindu deities appear in the ancient paintings along-side the figure of Buddha. It appears that a curious amalgam was found in Central Asia by mixing up art forms of India across the Himalaya on the south with those of China on the east. It is said that in Egypt, long before its occupation by the Greeks, there prevailed a system of painting on a previously prepared ground similar to the practice in vogue in ancient India. The European system of pictorial groundwork is entirely different from that of India. In India two kinds of ground-work are generally met with. Stone walls, in the first instance, made as smooth as possible and then a priming consisting of a well-prepared mixture of cowdung, earth, husks of paddy or decomposed fibers of wood have been laid on the surface of the stone to the thickness of half an inch; and sometimes, in order to remove any unevenness to the extent of two to three inches. In painting the



ceilings the walls were left uneven. Finally, the earthen priming was covered over with a thin layer of semi-liquid earth, strained through some fine linen. After all, on the surface thus prepared a white paint (consisting not of line, but probably of chalk or powdered conch shells) was applied very thinly two or three times over. The second and subsequent coats were only applied after the first and other coats were perfectly dry. It appears that after the ground had been prepared in this manner it was left to dry perfectly and then rendered smooth by means of conch shells or a polished stone. In the other style of preparing the ground no earth was applied to stone walls. Two or three coats of thin white paint, appearing like the shell of an egg, were applied to stone walls to serve as groundwork for paintings. We have observed such plastering in Central India in paintings of the second century B. C., found in the Jogimara cave at Ramgarh hills, C. P. Fresco of this description is met with, in very rare instances, at Ajanta and Bagh. In the verandah of the Rangmahal cave and in cave No. III at Bagh the ground on which the paintings are done is so brick-red in colour as to be mistaken for powdered brick; but we have seen the hill from which the red earth used for the purpose was obtained and is still available in immense quantity. On the surface of some broken columns in Bagh Cave No. IV and in other caves in which the ornamental work on the columns has been damaged we noticed the use of sand and lime plastering which appear to be very old. It may be inferred from



this that the use of sand and lime plastering has been known in India since the eighth century. In Italy two kinds of wall paintings were known—one was known as *Fresco-Secco* and the other *Fresco-Buono* or Pure Fresco. The first was a dry process and second, a wet fresco process.

It is mentioned in the old Italian books on art regarding *Albaria-Opera* or the mode of preparing the ground for paintings that at first a *trullissattio* or rough cast was made of sand and lime and then well-strained lime and sand (powdered marble also was used) were applied on its surface. The successive coatings of sand and lime were, according to the practice, applied before the preceding ones had completely dried up. The sand and lime was strained through a fine medium before the application of *intonaco*, the fine coat of plaster. Cennino in his book mentions the proportions used in mixing sand with lime. According to him one part of lime should be mixed with two parts of sand. The German proportion of mixing was one part of lime with three parts of sand. As soon as the ground was completed a coat of work; resin and oil was anointed and driven by heat and then polished over till the surface shines like mirror. After the completion of the groundwork the surface was constantly kept moist by frequent application of lime water and then paintings were done with colours. It would be impossible to draw pictures if the surface was left unused and exposed to atmospheric influences for any length of time. On account of this the Italian painters used to prepare only as much ground as they could make

use of in the course of a single day. This is why the separating lines of their daily work can be detected in the Italian frescoes under close examination.

The process of drawing pictures while the fresco was wet called *Fresco Buono* or wet process. The process of drawing pictures after the completion of the ground and application of lime water on the thoroughly dried surface was called *Fresco Secco* or dry process. It is the characteristic of the European ground for painting, that work is rendered impossible if the fresco dries up completely. As the ancient Indian ground for painting was made of earth it required no preliminary drenching process for painting work. Herein lies the real difference between the European and Indian methods of fresco paintings. In Europe, colours were made chiefly with three kinds of adhesive substances—size-tempera or colour made of gum from size, egg-tempera or colour mixed with yolk of an egg; and wax-tempera or colour made with wax—were in constant use. In Indian painting the gum or mucilage from *Bel* and *Neem* trees and mucilage from tamarind seed are used as adhesive substance with paints. It is difficult to find out the exact kind of mucilaginous substance actually used in Bagh paintings. There are paintings on the verandah of cave No. IV *Rangmahal*, the roof of which has completely given way. These paintings have withstood the inclemencies of the seasons for nearly a thousand years. Sir W. Richmond has experimented with a painting done with the yolk of an egg by exposing it to atmospheric



influences for a period of six months, with the result that the painting did not suffer any change or damage. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Painting). We have heard from the local painters of Bengal and Orissa that the use of gum prepared from tamarind seeds makes the paintings improve with age. These painters have been practicing their craft from generation to generation for three or four hundred years and the paintings done and handed down by their forefathers testify to their statements. Nowhere were animal or vegetable colours used in fresco painting. Colours produced from stone, mineral substance and earth were, however, constantly used for that purpose. In the Indian fresco-paintings at Bagh and Ajanta etc., yellow ochre, chalk, various kinds of red ochre, terraverte or green earth, black earth or gray and many other colours and sapphires (lapiz lazuli) are found to have been used. In the paintings at Bagh, traces of lac-dye are often met with. In the ancient Sinhalese paintings blue colours are almost absent and yellow colours are rare. Some colours were obtained by mixing different colours. The composition of the Bagh paintings consists like that of the Ajanta paintings of a close combination of different objects and yet it is very attractive. The composition of a (*nauch*) picture in Bagh is done in circular. The movements of the dance have been vividly depicted by the inclination of the heads of the dancing girls each in opposite directions. The thickness of the crowd in a procession of elephants and horses has been intensified by drawing them very close together. There is a painting of a *mahout* in repose, showing



the man while driving the elephant in a procession lying leaning towards the animal's head with his head resting on his hands. It would seem that if the *mahout* had been shown in a sitting posture his head could not be represented in the painting which was drawn close to the ceiling. This defect in the pose has been so cleverly manipulated as to defy detection except on very close scrutiny. There is no doubt that the Bagh painters were quite conscious of the rhythmical balance in the composition of their paintings. The fragments surviving on the walls of the verandah of Cave No. IV (*Rangmahal*) were drawn in two different styles. Besides these there are paintings inside the same cave and in Cave No. III which disclose variety in style and treatment. The paintings on some portion of the verandah in Cave No. IV seem to be the handiwork of master artists, while those in another part of the same verandah seem to belong to different, of less skilled hand. In the Ajanta paintings, too, there are ample indications that they are the works of different nature in each cave. The paintings of the *Rangmahal* in Bagh, which are still in a comparatively good state of preservation, are works of a markedly high order as regards their composition and style are concerned. The painters' skill which characterises the Ajanta frescoes is wanting in the Bagh paintings. These latter with their light and shade and their colour-contrasts remind us of the latter famous Italian paintings of the fifteenth century. It is not yet known if there was any painting in Europe or any other part of the world (Pompeii excepted) coeval with that of

Bagh, so far advanced in technique and execution. The folds in elephant's trunk and soft portions of its neck have been so skilfully 'stippled' that it is difficult to imagine an artist, at such a remote period, producing such works of high order. The shading of the legs, the body and the muscles of horses is rendered with such delicacy as to stand comparison with the comparatively recent works of Rembrandt. In sort, a closer examination of the works of the ancient Indian artists would go to show that they were fully acquainted with the technique of paintings for which credit is usually given to modern painters. (See Acharekar's '*Rupdarsini*'—The Indian Approach to Human Form, 1949). The decorative painting in Cave No. IV bears testimony to the skill of the painters in drawing lines of the utmost firmness and delicacy. Out of the nine caves in Bagh that can be inspected two have decayed through the effects of time and are likely in the course of a few hundred years to be wiped out of existence. Of the remaining seven caves remnants of damaged frescoes exist only in Caves Nos. III and IV. In one or two of the caves the plastering for ground work and traces of colouring matter on the columns are only visible here and there. In the centre and side of the ceiling of the wall of Cave No. II decorative work in the form of panels of lotus flowers are painted. At present the whole place has been darkened by smoke from the incense-pots of the *Sanyasis* who have made it their abode. Some decorative designs exist on the ceiling of the verandah adjoining the hall of Cave No. III. On one side there is the figure of



of a girl in a stooping posture engaged fanning with a fly-whisker on one side of the door-way, on another side only the face of a girl is visible. Within the room there existed at one time a representation of the Buddha in the posture known as *Padmasana* and with an umbrella overhead encircled by an aureole. All that remains now are portions of the feet of the Buddha, a part of the aureole and umbrella. The other portions have all worn out. A disciple of the Buddha is represented with an incense carrier beside one of the figures of the Buddha. There was, in the central wall of the room, a gigantic representation of the Buddha standing, with figures on either side of lions riding on elephants to represent a throne. Grounds had been evidently prepared in some of the rooms adjoining Cave No. III, but we found no painting worth speaking of.

In front of the entrance to the *Rangmahal* (Cave No. IV) there are thirty-five paintings of Buddha in meditation (each about five inches in height) in seven rows, five in each row. Lotus petals in the shape of aureoles adorn these, very much in the style of the background against which the temporary images of gods and goddesses in Bengal are set. These are apparently the handiwork of one and the same artist. This kind of images painted daily by the lay worshippers are still in vogue in Japan, China and Tibet. There is a coloured ornamental scroll round the hall of the *Rangmahal* about six feet in width. It consists principally of black, white, yellow and green colours. On a column in the hall there are



figures which look as if seated on boats. The raised portions of these boats look like human arms, so that figures have the appearance of being four armed. These figures are drawn in black and white. They are now in a state of utter decay. Beneath the ceiling, ornamental paintings of flowers, fruits and birds appear on separate panels. The roof has completely given way. The ceiling of this cave was at one time adorned with decorative designs. More skill in drawing than the colouring is evidenced by the paintings inside the caves. Just above the first entrance there is a painting of a man squatting on the ground inside a walled enclosure with his hand resting on one of his knees which is raised while the other leg lies stretched on the ground. Close by, there stands the figure of a girl in a banana garden looking backward with one arm akimbo, and the other hand supporting her chin. Just above this is the figure of a man lying prostrate. In ancient sanskrit literature there are ample references on summer rests under banana gardens. In another painting a portion of the face of a queer looking man appears. On one side of this, on the wall close to a door, there are conventional representation of hills in yellow and red, surmounted by a garden. Two or three men appear in the garden at the foot of the hills; there are faces of girls, the other parts of whose figures are completely obliterated. There is another wall close by. Near this wall there is a slightly raised ground, with a man wearing coat (apparently a common person) squatting with his head resting on his cheek in an attitude of contemplation. Alongside this there

is the figure of a man who looks like an ascetic seated on a bench with his hands clasped together. His expression is serious and devotional. At the feet of this man there sits a pigmy who is apparently a valet. On the top of the next doorway of the cave, there is a figure of a dark girl seated on a striped cushion with another figure in front of her seated on a bench obviously discussing some serious topics. The loveliness of the dark girl's colour is undecipherable. This painting sets forth as nothing else can the exquisite beauty which may be associated with a swarthy skin. On another side of the same door there is a girl in the act of plucking something from a tree. Close to her visible portions of the face and hand of another girl. The background of this painting has been represented somewhat in the shape of hills and clouds drawn in a conventional manner. The hills are arranged in cubes just as done in Ajanta paintings. Two or three black faced monkeys appear on the top of the hills. In the space at the middle of two doorways amongst the paintings already mentioned there is a colossal figure of a divine *Dwarapala* or heavenly porter wearing a coronet. This figure seems to have been drawn very much in the style of the two heavenly porters in the cave-paintings on either side of the walls in Ajanta cave No. 1. These two Ajanta paintings have been now identified as 'Bodhisattva Padmapani' and 'Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara' respectively. Size of these two paintings, is nearly twice the size of ordinary man of average height. Close to the divine *Dwarapala* there is a royal personage at Bagh lost in deep meditation and close to it there



are figures of two peacocks amidst clouds on a hill. It is probable that this is intended to convey an idea of paradise. Just on top of the head of the porter there are *kinnaris* or celestial choristers with bird-like feet, playing on an instrument like the *sitar*. It may be inferred from all this that, it was intended to show that the caves were under the protection of the gods and angelic beings.

We could only decipher the paintings mentioned above after we had been in the Bagh caves for a month constantly engaged in the examination of paintings (while copying) after moistening them with water. A reference to my article on the Bagh caves in Prabasi (Bengali magazine) for 1324 (Beng) will show the difficulty that is experienced in deciphering the frescoes. I could not at my first visit (in 1917) adequately describe the paintings although I had personally inspected them very minutely.

These are in existence on a space about fifty by seven feet in a part of the verandah between cave No. IV *Rangmahal* and the door of cave No. V. The manner and sequence of events as depicted in the closely connected paintings leave no room for doubt that these paintings are intended to describe some particular historical event. We have compared them with Buddhist Jatakas and we found that they may agree in part only but not completely with some of those stories. We were able to copy paintings in this block. The first scene in it is that of a sorrowful queen and her chamber-maid, the next to it is a meeting between two princes and two visitors, the next



painting represents some flying Buddhist monks (arhatas), then follow two paintings showing some dancing girls, dancing along with two dancers wearing Persian costume. The next shows a procession of royal personages and soldiers mounted on horses and elephants, and lastly there is a monk squatting under *asoka* tree in a garden or a park (arama). The whole painting of the forty feet wall is, in this manner, worked out in a panorama.\* Although the ancient Sinhalese chronicle *Mahavamsa* is full of impossible legends, it undoubtedly gives some impression of the manners and customs and the mode of worship prevalent in the ancient period. The references contained in the *Mahavamsa* to the traditions customs and other matters relating to the Buddhist period in India agree in various points with the paintings at Ajanta, Bagh and other places. On festive occasions, when the Buddhist kings used to go out in state procession with their full retinue, it was customary for bands of well-dressed dancing girls and troops of musicians to go with them. This custom is also mentioned in the Valmiki's *Ramayana*. The dancing women had thin hair bedecked with costly ornaments and flowers. In the Bagh and Ajanta paintings dancing girls are shown with their heads similarly decked out. The Royal procession depicted in the Bagh paintings show stylishly dressed women with drums slung from their necks mounted on elephants, corresponding

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\* The original copies executed by A. K. Haldar Nanda Lal Bose, S. N. Kar (in Jan. Feb. 1921) can be seen at the Gwalior Darbar; and the replicas are at Kalabhavan Santiniketan and at the Govt. School of Arts & Crafts Museum, Lucknow.

to the accounts contained in the *Mahavamsa*. The Bagh paintings contained representations of monks or holy men flying in the midst of clouds. According to the *Mahavamsa* arhats or Buddhist monks of great merits used to fly through the air in order to display their super-human powers. The painting at Bagh of a holy man in a garden would appear to represent a picture of some *Rajguru* or preceptor of Royalty in the Royal *arama* or park as mentioned in the *Mahavamsa*. Among the pictures representing singing and dancing the two figures of men in Persian dress seem to be wearing wigs and they do not appear to be dancing in harmony with the soft steps of the dancing girls, but to be indulging in a wild unrhythmic-caper much in the style of the Afgan hill-men of the present day. There are allusions in the *Mahavamsa* to such mimic dancers in connection with royal festivities. In the paintings of processions at Bagh, men are represented as having their hair tied in a knot behind and wrapped with chintz cloth. We have not come across in the other paintings at Bagh or elsewhere any similar figure of men with feminine coiffure. The figures on the railing at Sanchi represent men with their knot of hair wrapped with cloth, but these are not in the same style. At Sanchi the knots of plaited hair are tied in a knot on the top of the head in Sikh fashion. While describing a Stupa there are references to *Sukhakama* or plaster work, *Kankauthaka* or gold or silver painting and *Panchangulika patika* or a kind of ornamental design. We did not find in the paintings of Ajanta such perfect and spirited representation



of horses as those in the picture of processions at Bagh. These are such as to remind one of life-like animals drawn by the great modern artist Landseer. The pictures of elephants are drawn so holdly as those at Ajanta. There are paintings of ducks among the decorative avian pictures on the ceiling. Besides these, there are paintings of the common blue coloured local pigeons and of peacocks exquisitely drawn. The picture of the peacock has been badly damaged. The colour effect displayed in painting pigeons is exquisite. Prototypes of these pigeons are still to be found nesting in the caves. Amongst articles of furniture and other articles, saddlery bows, decorated scabbards, *howdas* with striped frills and pearls, various kinds of musical instruments and chintz coats are all represented in the Bagh painting. In the Ajanta paintings too there are pictures of men with chintz coats. A kind of cloth with a design of ducks bears resemblances to a specimen existing at Ajanta. Floral decoration for the head, varieties of bangles, necklaces round pearls set with gems are to be seen in these paintings. The royal diadems with ornamental frills of pearls, necklaces worn by royalty and ornaments resembling the "Brahmanical thread, like those to be seen at Ajanta abound in Bagh cave paintings. The royal cushions and bolsters are also drawn in the fashion of the Ajanta painting. From the fragment of an inscription found in one of the caves, as read by Dr R. D. Banerjee, it appears that certain Buddhist lay worshipper *upasaka* named 'Harideva', drew these paintings or decorated the



caves with these fresco-paintings with the help of painters in order to earn spiritual merit.

It would appear from the accounts left by earlier visitors to these caves, that they regarded the task of copying these paintings as an impossible task. (See Major C.E. Luard's account of the Bagh caves, *Indian Antiquary*, August, 1910). The paintings can be seen only by constantly saturating them with water (and for which soft sponge was used by us). The ignorant people around the place thought of acquiring merit by scribbling their names on the paintings on the shrine of "*Punch Pondu* (as they have named the Bagh caves), while some have scraped out from time to time portion of the colouring matter from the wall of the shrine.

Although the paintings of the Bagh caves are not earlier than the late works at Ajanta, the nature and style of the paintings very intimately follow those at Ajanta. The languid grace and the general type of the pose of the figure easily recall the conventions of the artists of Ajanta. The Bagh paintings are the direct descendants of the School of Ajanta. They are supposed to have been executed between the middle of the sixth and that of the seventh century.

## STRAY THOUGHTS ON ART

When we look at paintings, our vision is always qualified by the surroundings amidst which we may happen to be placed at that particular time, our mental moods also lending their own colouring to it, and for this reason a work of art which may touch the heart of one spectator with immediate directness, may fail to please the other altogether. It may, perhaps be due to the same psychological truth which applies to that proverbial mistake—the mistake one makes, sometimes, of taking a rope for a serpent, or a serpent for a rope in a dark night. In fact, it is only the impress of the artist's mental state that is left on the painting he draws, and to realize that mental state in all its reality the spectator requires greater depth of thought and education than the artist himself.

\* \* \* \* \*

2. Just as without a proper unfoldment of certain faculties of perception one cannot fully realize the inner spirit and beauty of Nature, so it is in the case of paintings also, nay, to appreciate works of art even a greater degree of development and training are required in the aesthetic sensibilities of the mind. It is not possible, of course, to represent in paintings the quivering restlessness of the breeze or the harmonious blending of light and shade that we find in the world of Nature, but the artist can give exact expression in his paintings to that thrilling softness of touch in the

breeze, or that tremulous dancing of light on the leaves which gained instant access to his heart in the flash of a fleeting moment, and these he can invest with immortality and preserve for all eternity in his paintings. For this reason if we happen to see the portrait of a young man on a canvas, we may be sure that he will never attain the old age which is brought about by the ceaseless change and flow of the material world, but remain there for ever more crowned in the spring-time splendour of undying youth. So it is that paintings are silent and are reticent.

\* \* \* \* \*

3. The artist does not create with the help of his hands or his eyes only; his painting is the product of his mind; so, in judging paintings, instead of trying to find out the exact quantity of paint or the particular methods that the painter has used, it is far more essential to make sure as to how much of the artist's mind the work of arts contain.

\* \* \* \* \*

4. All artists are self-forgetful. The more conscious an artist is of himself, the cruder and uglier his works are bound to become. The finer feelings and delicate sensibilities do not co-exist with an acute consciousness of self, they fold up their petals in fright, like the bashful mimosa, at the slightest possible touch.

\* \* \* \* \*

5. Nature holds up before us the finite which dwells in Infinity; but the artist represents the Infinity in terms of the finite within the bounds of colour and form. So Nature brings the endless



blue sky, the boundless expanse of the sombre seas within the finite range of our vision, while the artist preaches the glory of the Infinite by enshrining in his works of art the eternal ideas suggested by Nature.

\* \* \* \* \*

6. An artist's creative works cannot be expected to effect an-immediate reformation in the country or in the minds of the people by arousing inspiring thoughts as soon as they are finished; it is the steady and permanent influence which they exert on the people by instilling into their minds a sensitiveness for beauty and a habit of thoughtfulness which make them so invaluable for the country. And so it is that the older a painting grows the more precious it becomes. This value has nothing to do with the price of painter's brush or his colour—its value is that of its depth.

\* \* \* \* \*

7. The flowers look quite beautiful as they blossom on the tree, but man can never feel satisfied till he has culled them and trimmed them and arranged them in the flower-vase and thus brought his own artistic instincts into play. Nature in its beauty and variety is beyond description, but so long as he has not been able to represent it to the public by creating it anew through his own mental process and given it the particular colouring of his own vision in works of art or literature, man can have no rest. So 'Nature' and 'Art' are united together by the same inner thread; the external difference which they may appear to possess is not anything real or essential.

8. Everyone is looking at things, but how many are those who can really see? Innumerable are the plays of light and shade, sunshine and storm going on in this world of Nature; but how many are there who are given the opportunity of observing them with the inner sight which alone counts? This deeper message of nature reaches the artists, who in their works of Art, give expression to truths which lie beyond the range of vision or the reach of ordinary perception. (But this they do not do, of course, by trying to give exact photographic representation of Nature.)

\* \* \* \* \*

9. One cannot, in works of art, just say 'this person said this' or 'that person did that and sat down there'—as they may do in literature, and go on explaining the sentiments of facts with ample detailed foot-notes. In this respect all paintings are still. They express their ideas definitely enough, though they may suggest many different kinds of thoughts in the minds of different spectators, but this they do mainly through the medium of suggestion. Paintings do not care for critical commentaries, nor do they require any external help to express themselves.

\* \* \* \* \*

10. Not less than ninety percent of our people educated and uneducated, show a sort of blind partiality for Western art—our own art seems to be an eyesore to them. But as a matter of fact, the greatest thing that we have to learn from the Western artists is that they busy themselves with the Western, that is, their own art, and do not, like us, dabble in matters which lie beyond one's sphere.



11. Just as to be an efficient jeweller one needs a sound training about the detection of false-stones from good ones, and a great deal of patience besides, so to understand work of arts, also, one must possess a previous education, equally, if not more thorough. Many people seem to think that works of art should be of such a kind as to charm the eyes of the beholder at first sight, but that this is a mistaken notion needs no telling. The vulgar eye is delighted with a gaudy display of colours, like children, who want nothing but coloured things; but as a matter of fact, works of art, the main aim of which is to attract attention, may be anything but they are not artistic. It is only the work which passes the test of the jewel expert in the realm of art—the art—critic, and survives the taste, that can claim the name of art.

\* \* \* \* \*

12. When does a painting begin to live and move?—When the real connoisseur evokes the *rasa* of his mind-perception and brings to bear his whole faculty of thought and imagination in looking at a painting. Then the painting does not any more appear to be mere collection of lines and colours, he then realises the inner music, as it were, lying deep beyond the reach of all colours and forms, and the painting is understood at once, not as a particular grouping of external shapes and figures, but as an impress of a mood or an emotion expressed in a moment of inspiration.

\* \* \* \* \*

13. It is not possible to cling to the art of any particular place or periods as the



ultimate standard or the final perfection of all artistic effort—because art can never arrive at an end; by the blessings of God, human creations like divine ones go on developing themselves in ways eternally new, and by indicating a final end to them, we simply take their life away.

\* \* \* \* \*

14. The artist crystallizes in his art a particular mood of his mind by taking it away from the flowing stream of his thought, and his moment's mood thus enshrined in art never fails to inspire new emotions in the minds of spectators even after centuries have rolled away. The conception of building the Taj Mahal which in some unremembered auspicious moment, first glimmered across the mind of the Emperor Shahjahan like a dream in a moonlit night, resulted in the creation of a beauty that even to-day, after hundreds of years, never fails to bring fresh visions of delight to thousands of spectators from all parts of the world. It is here that art is eternal and universal.

\* \* \* \* \*

15. Some think that the creation of forms is the only aim of art, because paintings are naturally associated in our minds with the idea of forms; while others are of opinion that the chief function of paintings should be the expression of ideas. But the truth is, in paintings *Rasas* and ideas find their dwelling in forms,—thought and shape, like body and mind live in complete unity and co-operate in the production of an organic whole. It must be said, however, that the object of art is mainly in the representation of ideas,

and not in the grouping of forms or figures.

\* \* \* \* \*

16. Art like literature is liable to degenerate into a mere riddle revealing in its incomprehensible complexity, if too many ideas are packed indiscriminately into it. So we find in the art histories of the world that true artists from the oldest time have always attempted to express some one fundamental idea in their paintings or pieces of sculpture, and this idea has come out beautifully in its simplicity and completeness. But now-a-days, in the centres of modern European culture and civilization, forms and external shapes have attained such a degree of vagueness and complexity in the art of the new schools of painting, that really to get at the idea behind the paintings one requires prodigious powers of patience which are taxed to the utmost before one can possibly tread one's way through the labyrinths of ambiguous complexity spread out before one's eyes. Here it is the technique which has overpowered and submerged the creative aspect of art. For this reason one has seldom the chance, in the present age, of coming across anything so genuine, easy and inspiring as the sculptures of Egypt or the Byzantine paintings of the mediaeval Europe.

\* \* \* \* \*

17. It is a fact that no real connection can be found between the personal life of the artist, and his art. The real essence of his personality finds its eternal expression in his paintings, and any attempted analysis of his personal affairs, for this purpose, is bound to be futile. The work of



an artist is the most intimate introduction to his real life, the petty details of his daily doings can have no particular significance in this connection. There are many pieces of artistic creation renowned all over the world which give constant pleasure to millions of spectators, while the names of the artists who created them are hidden deep in the abyss of obscurity.

\* \* \* \* \*

18. Rhythm comes into play spontaneously when the human heart comes to be connected with Nature by an inner bond of intimate appreciation—it is then that the creations of man can possibly represent the finer spirit and beauty of God's own creation.

\* \* \* \* \*

19. Before the process of creation is complete, and so long as the artistic idea dwells within the mind of the artist, he can claim it as a personal possession, but directly when it gains expression in a painting or a poem it becomes as much the property of the public as of the producer himself.

\* \* \* \* \*

20. The art of an artist reveals not only the essence of his own personality but that of the country or nation to which he belongs. So we find that whether it is because the primitive barbarian tribes worshipped ghosts, or whether it is due to their living amidst the many terrors and surprises of dense dark forest, it is the feeling of fear and wonderment which finds more frequent expression in their art than anything else. Their art was not mainly for religion or the creation of beauty, but gave shape chiefly to the many



formless superstitions and other peculiarities of mental out look which characterized them. For this reason monstrous figures and uncouth shapes, and the stripes and colour combinations as on the skins of animals like tigers, recur pretty constantly in their schemes of artistic creation. These fit in well with their non-human propensities, and the jungle-life amidst which they passed their days.

\* \* \* \* \*

21. Grace and beauty are everywhere in the world of Nature appearing wherever we may happen to turn our eyes, in fruit and flower, sky and wind, or in the manifold play of light and shade; and the only aim of the true artist is to realize this beauty intimately and reveal it anew through his own creation. He does not attempt to collect it from all possible quarters, as it were, and give a detailed record of the same with accurate statistical figures like an official surveyor, he gives expression to it in the light of his own emotional experiences.

\* \* \* \* \*

22. The artist or the poet, though they may not have always proclaimed it in so many words, have been constantly expressing through their creative work the sentiment of universal love. It is because universal ideas spontaneously blossom out in their minds that they cannot bring themselves to creat anything with the special object of pleasing a particular country or a group of people, their message is meant for the audience-hall of the whole world. Raphael's painting, or Shakespeare's dramas are, for this reason being received

with affectionate appreciation and fervent adoration, even to-day, by millions of all nations. Their creation has no ulterior end except the joy of creating itself, their work is not like that of the man of business whose aim it is to accumulate things for future use; it is rather the repayment to the world of the debt of happiness which it gave them so bountifully. Of course, there are those who produce humorous sketches or satires solely with the object of opening the eyes of the people to particular truths, but owing to the very fact that they are born with a specific purpose, and are the outcome of some current cause of excitement, these productions exhaust themselves within the narrow sphere of a particular place or period, and consequently have no more life-force left to them for any further activity.

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23. Rabindra Nath Tagore before he was honoured by the Nobel Prize once remarked to the author that the language of the fine arts is a universal one, and also pointed out that there can be no real obstacle to people of any part of the world understanding it. It seems, otherwise in the case of literature where a poet can be appreciated only by people who know the language in which he writes, a fact that naturally makes many people miss the opportunity of appreciating him altogether. His creations are, therefore, obliged to remain confined within the bounds of the language and literature of his own motherland. In this respect the fine arts have a wider appeal. This is true, but still we find that in the case of our own poet, his ideas, even through translations, have



inspired millions of people all over the world, a fact which goes to prove that like truth, or like fire which can never be kept hidden under the cover of ashes; genuine creative work also can never remain buried in the narrow limits of a particular language or land but transcends all confines sooner or later, and shines resplendent in its original splendour before the enchanted eyes of the whole world.

\* \* \* \* \*

24. Artists are popularly described as worshippers of beauty. But if this is intended to indicate that they are concerned only with external beauty of a figure or a form, then we must protest against this presumption; for artists worship that beauty only which they perceive in the light of their own inner vision, and this has hardly anything to do with things that generally attract the popular eye. To put it accurately artists are not so much the worshippers of beauty of a *Rasa*, or the inner pervading spirit in an object.

\* \* \* \* \*

25. Wakefulness is the sign of life, while slumber signifies death. It is the poet and the artist, who in this world give the best evidence of this wakefulness. Their works of art and literary creation bear eternal testimony to the truth of their having opened their eyes anew each day with the rising of the morning sun, and this the people of all ages are given the chance to test for themselves. The play of the seasons, spring and summer and monsoon—nothing is ever wasted for them, and as the song goes\* "they would fain fill their

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\*From song by Dr. Rabiandra Nath Tagore.



baskets with the fruits and flowers of all the seasons as they come and go" and keep an ever-awake receptiveness for all that life has to offer to us. As for the others, their days also pass, of course, but they pass mainly in counting them from day to day.

\* \* \* \* \*

26. "I like this" or "I do not like this at all" —it is the tendency of modern critics to utter either of these emphatic assertions immediately after looking at a picture. But this is, indeed, no real test for a painting; for the first sight may not be the auspicious one after all. There are paintings which appear attractive at first but fail to leave any abiding impression on the mind, while there are others which gradually grow into one's mind and thought the more one sees them, in spite of their inability to interest the eye instantaneously. On the whole, one of the best tests of the real worth of a painting is in the durability of the interest it produces, indeed, that indicates the idea of its real worth more than anything else. And this impression may settle in the mind not directly after one has seen a painting for the first time, but little by little, after one has looked at it many times and tried to understand its underlying motive.

27. It does not do, merely, to carve a figure out of a block of stone, the spirit of life has to be infused therein to make it live. This infusion of life the artist effects by making the piece of sculpture radiate the glow of loveliness through the delicate contours of the face and the body. It is quite possible for a figure to seem rigid and

motionless inspite of its possessing nicely designed wings, but the true artist can quite easily fashion a figure and make it fly or move without the necessity of endowing it with wings or even special gestures indicative of movement.

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28. Like all others, the artist also has world of his own. Anyone can master after undergoing some course of memory training the faculty of remembering the things that he sees, and of reproducing them in paintings with photographic accuracy; but the rare gift which distinguishes the real artist is the gift of re-creating a thing in the atmosphere of his own personality, and giving it a permanent artistic shape. Every artist has his own inner world whence he observes and where he receives the various manifestations and messages of life around him, and it is the difference which every artist possesses in his world of personality that makes it possible for art to preserve its inexhaustible variety and originality—otherwise, all paintings would drive one crazy with the maddening monotony of photographic representations.

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29. Whence does the artist get the world which he creates by himself? He gets the necessary materials for it from the realm of matter which finds entrance into his consciousness through his sense-experiences in the shape of sound and smell and sight. It would not be true to say that he is only receiving, or only given away,—it is more like the negative and positive currents which in their



unity give expression to one wholeness. The harmony of sounds which is eternally coming out from the heart of Nature becomes audible only when the artist's finger touches the strings. For this reason neither Nature nor the artist can create *Rasa* alone; for its production their mutual sympathy and co-operation is necessary.

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30. Having come to the seashore to-day, I realize that land is not limited by its own boundary-line, but preserves itself by its union with water, which is no less elemental and true than land. There the water flies as a piece of cloud, ruffled by the wings of the birds which beat their way through it, fringed with the manifold melting colours of light,—it is out to cross the sea! And now its friendship with the land commences. Now it goes on giving itself in rivers and streams, passing through meadow and woodland, and touching the skirt of vale and hill on its onward way. Plants, trees, beasts and birds, men and women, all are filled with the surge of new life and saved as they come into contact with this vitalising nectar-like fluid. Men give themselves up to songs, birds begin their hymns of joy upon the leafy branches of greening trees. In the human habitations, and in the forests and glades this call of new life brings out hidden resources of joy, and the shine of happiness begins to gleam and glitter all around. Land is like the limiting lines of a painting and the water is inner fluid-like idea, and it is the union of these two that fills the world of life with *rasa* with the spirit of beauty and har-



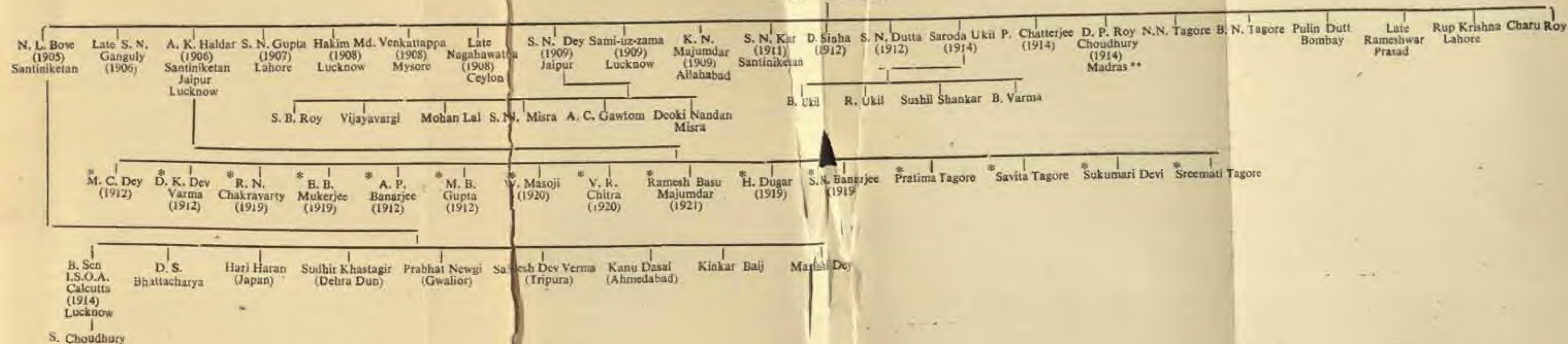
mony. And so it is that a painting which gives undue emphasis and prominence to its form and frame only, remains barren and lifeless like a desert, deserving every other name except that of art.

## The Indian Society of Oriental art Calcutta of 1907

*Original Members:*—H. E. Lord Kitchner, The Hon'ble Mr. Justice Woodroffe, The Hon'ble Mr. Justice Rampini, Dudley B. Myers, C. F. Larmour; Abanindra Nath Tagore, Capt. Fitz Gerald, Lt.-Col. Harris, Lt.-Col. Phillott, Dr. Annandale, A. Rodocanachi, N. Blount, H.P. Martin, E. Thornton, E. Meyer, A. Stephen, W. Garth, J. H. Burkill, E. W. S. Russell, Gaganendra Nath Tagore, E. E. Meugens, Dr. Garth, Col. Cowper, Sir Herbert Risley, W. Gregory, F. A. Larmour, Maharaja Jagadindra Nath Roy Bahadur of Nattore, Surendra Nath Tagore, J. Chaudhuri, A. Chaudhuri, Samarendra Nath Tagore, Jamini Prokash Ganguly, Impre Schwaiger, The Hon'ble Mr. Justice Holmwood, H. G. Graves.



APPENDIX II  
RENAISSANCE OF INDIAN ART  
ABANINDRA NATH TAGORE  
AND  
THREE GENERATIONS OF HIS DISCIPLES  
A. N. TAGORE



\*\* Though not a direct disciple, a close follower of Dr. Tagore.

\* These artists primarily studied under A. K. Halder at Kala Bhawan, Santiniketan between 1912-1915 and 1919-1923 and subsequently under N. L. Bose for some times at Santiniketan.

The following artists were trained under Principal A. K. Halder and B. Sen at the Government School of Arts and Crafts, Lucknow, between 1925-1945. A. D. Thomas, B. L. Shah, Narayan Joshi, H. L. Merb, Sri Ram Vaish, Radhey Shyam Bhatnagar, Sukumar Basu, B. N. Jijja, P. R. Roy, S. M. Oyama, K. M. Dhar, S. C. Dube, P. Karamkar, S. Sen Roy, R. Chatterjee, Baleshwar Dayal, B. P. Mittal, T. D. Sinha, B. C. Gue, S. N. Naitiyal, P. Banarjee, Lal Mohan Mukerjee, Harish Chandra, Sukhbir Sanghail, Ranvir Saksena, Pratul Biswas, Jagdish Swarup Gupta, Mrs. Kamla Rathore, Sushila Topa, Leela Mehta and others.

N. B.—Dr. Tagore's influence is felt through his and his pupil's works indirectly and directly in all over India and now there are large number of artists advocating and supporting Renaissance movement of Indian art.





## APPENDIX

Translation from the original letter in Bengali of Dr.  
A. N. Tagore addressed to the author.

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Bireshwar has confused tradition with fashion. Just as the fruit without a stem is impossible, art devoid of tradition is also an impossibility. A honey-comb is built according to tradition and honey is also prepared according to it from variety of flowers by new-commer bees. Honey produced without a honey-comb is nothing but a chemical products which come generally from Germany and other foreign lands. The taste of which differs from real honey. Saccharine is good for a patient and glucose is also meant for a dying man but for a healthy person either sugar-cane or honey is necessary. Some drunkard drink '*Tody*' and that too is prepared according to traditional methods. Molasses cannot be produced without observing traditional technique. All flesh, bones and muscles which we possess are composed according to it and that is why we can exist. Yourself, myself and thyself cannot shake it off as it can create only a spiritual existence for us. From East to West nowhere in this earth art is without a tradition, and as such why it should differ in our case ?

The Universe is a garden. Allow your pupils to pick and choose their own nectors themselves. Otherwise without tradition painting and sculpture, if you can produce any as an example, such an example is better than precept. We should rather prefer Ajanta, but Argentine ?—never ! never !

Original Letter in Bengali of Dr. A. N. Tagore  
addressed to the author.

24/12/20

শ্রী. অমিত

ଆଜ୍ଞା ଗିରି ବିହାରୀ ଲେଖା ଯା ଯାହାକୁ ଆମେ କହୁଛୁ ତାହା ଗିରି  
ପାରିବି ।

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3700  
4200



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## SOME OPINIONS

**Prof. R. N. Deb of the Allahabad University says :—**

"Mr. Haldar is one of the most competent persons to write a book on modern Indian art. Himself a poet and a painter whose reputation has travelled beyond the boundaries of his own country, he is one of the most arresting of Dr. Abanindra Nath Tagore's pupils.— *Leader*, August 30, 1938.

**Prof. B. S. Mathur., D. A. V. College, Kanpur says:—**

"Art is to be practised like literature and practised with the help of past. Mr. A. K. Haldar writes: 'The new spirit of art has also its foundation on traditions, without Traditions all art products will be like a rootless tree.'"

**Taraporevala's Indian Literary Review, March, 1940:—**

"How under the tutelage of Abanindra Nath Tagore a whole school has sprung up which holds up the prestige of India is given by Mr. Haldar, one of the disciples of Dr. Tagore in an essay of the Title "Twenty-Five Years of contemporary Indian painting." (title of which in the Revised Edition is "Renaissance Movement") in his little book "Art and Tradition."

**The Statesman:—**

"This little book is a collection of essays on various aspects of art..... Mr. Haldar believes in Indian Art and at the same time sees the dangers to which it is liable. He insistently reminds artists and students that no slavish copying of any tradition or any master will produce real art; but he explains how a good teacher can inspire students to find their own forms of artistic expression and how right study of Tradition can enrich the art of to-day."







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